

Prishtina Insight

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PJ Harvey Confirms Dokufest Appearance

Singer-songwriter PJ Harvey and Irish photographer Seamus Murphy will be presenting their 12 short films at this year's Dokufest. Organisers of the Prizren festival, which is fast gaining a worldwide reputation, said they were thrilled by the news.

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Nationalists Resurrect Dream of Great Albania

Rise of nationalist parties in Albania and Kosovo puts unification of Albanian lands back on some people's agenda.

By Petrit Collaku

Next year Albania celebrates a century of independence. But the failure of the powers to create a state that included a big majority of Albanians remains a subject of resentment, which is receiving renewed attention thanks to the rise of nationalist parties in Kosovo and Albania.

In a poll conducted by Gallup International in November 2010, 80 per cent of Albanians in Kosovo, 62 per cent in Albania and 51 per cent of Albanians in Macedonia supported the idea of a Greater Albania encompassing Albania, mainly Albanian Kosovo and Western Macedonia and fragments

of Serbia, Montenegro and Greece.

In a surprise move this month, Serbia's President, Boris Tadic, suggested that the formation of a "Greater Albania" including Kosovo could even help solve ethnic squabbles in the region – possibly because this would allow Serbia not to recognize Kosovo.

Meanwhile, nationalist sentiment is on the rise among Albanians, if recent election results in Albania and Kosovo are anything to go by.

In Kosovo's last general election, in November 2010, the Self-Determination Movement, Levizja Vetevendosje, became the third largest political force after securing 13 per cent of the vote in the

first election it had contested.

With 14 deputies in Kosovo's Assembly, the street movement-turned party is establishing itself as the strongest opposition to the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, of Prime Minister Hashim Thaci.

As well as espousing union with Albania, Vetevendosje rejects Kosovo foreign-imposed national symbols, such as the blue-and-yellow flag and the international-mandated decentralization plan, which has led to the creation of new majority Serb municipalities enjoying substantial autonomy.

Over the border in Albania, a party representing the so-called Cham refugees, who were expelled

from Greece in the 1940s, also scored surprising successes in May 8 local elections.

With the slogan "I Love Albania," and campaigning with a mix of minority and nationalist politics, the Party for Democracy, Unity and Integration, PDIU, gained 65,000 votes. Two years earlier, in the 2009 general elections, it won only 14,000 voters.

The Chams originally resided in the coastal Epirus region of northern Greece before being thrown out after the Second World War. They want pressure placed on Greece to restore them their lost citizenship rights and property.

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"I was asked to Make Illegal Transfer by PM Advisor"

Former Kosovo Central Bank Governor, Hashim Rexhepi, has said that corruption allegations against him are part of a political plot and reveals details of the pressure placed on him by senior government figures to carry out illegal activities

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Experts Warn of Prishtina-Skopje Highway Costs

Kosovo's government has announced a new, expensive road construction project, despite its existing commitment to build the country's first highway, which is already straining the budget. The government had planned to...

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Nationalists Resurrect Dream of Great Albania

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While the party's main message is directed at solving Cham grievances, it has targeted a wider audience by styling itself a generally "patriotic party" and promoting the idea of a sort of ethnic Albanian economic zone in the Balkans.

The West is not keen:

While a fuzzy sentiment in favour of a pan-Albanian state makes electoral gains, the likelihood of anything of the sort actually happening remains small.

Article One of Kosovo's constitution expressly bans any such move. "The Republic of Kosovo shall have no territorial claims against, and shall seek no union with, any State or part of any State," it says.

This sentence was included to ease international fears that granting independence to Kosovo might lead to the creation of a Greater Albania. Kosovo's main parties have to date shown little interest in tackling this.

Kosovo's Interior Minister, Bajram Rexhepi, not unexpectedly, told Prishtina Insight that he did not even want to discuss the issue. "When we enter the EU, then we will be united [under Brussels]," he said.

However, his ministry has already signed a number of agreements with Albania bringing the two countries much closer together. Deals include establishing joint border controls, so that travellers need to show their documentation only once, and joint police action.

Economically, the two countries have also become closer with the building of a motorway, nicknamed the "Patriotic Highway", linking Prishtina and Tirana. Albania has also agreed to give Kosovo use of a seaport, Shengjin, in the north of the country.

Glauk Konjufca, a Self-Determination MP in Kosovo, says the movement is well aware that Albanians in Kosovo and Albania

have expressed a desire to unite.

Konjufca told Prishtina Insight that the most important immediate issue was to ensure Kosovo's sovereignty over the whole of its territory, adding that the current EU-mediated dialogue with Serbia ran counter to this. The northern sliver of Kosovo is run by local Serbs in tandem with Belgrade.

He said that Vetevendosje would first ensure that Kosovo gained control of all its borders before changing the constitution to allow for unification.

"We can then call a referendum and create one state, or another option is a confederation of two states," he said, adding that the issue of whether Tirana should be the overall capital was not important.

But he doubts these moves will happen soon, given the position of the current government. "This will not certainly happen while Kosovo is run by Hashim Thaci," he said.

He said the nation's desire for unification was opposed by Western powers partly because Kosovo's political elite had failed to make the case for it.

The negative term "Greater Albania" was routinely used by neighbouring countries to justify their continued occupation of Albanian land, he complained.

The recent statement of President Tadic of Serbia, that the Kosovo dispute should be solved through Belgrade and Tirana, intentionally presented the problem falsely, he continued.

"There is no 'ethnic dispute'," he said. "There is a problem between two countries: Kosovo and Serbia."

Self-Determination is not the only party in Kosovo looking afresh at the issue of an all-Albanian state.

The Movement for Unification, Levizja per Bashkim, also has two deputies in the Kosovo Assembly, after standing in coalition with Vetevendosje in the general election.

Secretary Valon Murati says their programme began to change in 1999

when Kosovo was freed from Serbian rule and the focus shifted from independence to unification.

But he added that they did not advocate an Albania within its "historic" frontiers, that is, stretching deep into Serbia and Greece.

But people had a right to self-determination, including the Serb community in northern Kosovo, he added.

"Where Albanians are a majority and have territorial continuity, they should be allowed self-determination, and this should be applied to the Serb community as well," Murati said.

Ordinary Kosovars, meanwhile, remain divided over the matter. Some see unification as a pipe dream. Others say it is already happening, without changes to international borders.

"Unification is happening now," Kreshnik Ceka, an Albanian studying at Prishtina University, said. Take the bilateral agreement between Albania and Kosovo which allows Kosovo police to patrol Albania during the summer holiday.

But another student told Prishtina Insight that struggling for a united state wasn't worth it. "Many countries in the world have similar problems and just imagine if everyone asked for their territories [to be united in one state]," he said.

"The great powers and the EU will not allow unification - and Western countries need to be asked about every step that Kosovo takes," one 65-year-old man said.

Remzi Lani, a political commentator from Tirana, says state unification is unrealistic and its discussion is counterproductive.

"Albania does not have the power to bring about the process of unification," Lani said, noting that mighty Germany had to wait until the fall of the Berlin wall to unite once again.

He agreed with Self-Determination's fight against corruption but was against the focus



on unification. "I do try to understand it but I think it is unrealistic," he said.

The attempt by Albania's Party of Justice, Integration and Unity, PDIU, to raise the plight of the Cham refugees, was more valid, he added. "I think the Chams' requests are natural," he said.

Lani also ruled out Albania getting involved with Tadic's idea for Serbia and Albania to settle Serb-Albanian disputes alone.

"Kosovo is an independent country and Albania cannot discuss Kosovo's partition, or any other such issues," Lani said.

The new reality was the more fluid communication between Albanians in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, which was occurring spontaneously, he added.

"This pan-Albanian integration is happening and it is a very natural process," he said.

British historian Noel Malcolm, author of acclaimed histories of Kosovo and Bosnia, has also poured cold water on the notion that Kosovo and Albania could unite into one state.

"This is a classic example of a political issue where everything depends on how you frame the question," he told Prishtina Insight last year.

"If you asked any Albanian in Albania or Kosovo, 'Do you think one day it would be a good thing for these two to unite?', the majority would say, 'Yes, one day that would be good'. And if you say, 'Do you think that an historical injustice was done in 1913 when the first version of this border was created?', everyone will say, 'Yes'.

"But if you asked people in a genuine referendum: 'Would you prefer to be a unified state, so that your politics and the decisions that affect your life might be dominated by politicians from the other place, not

from your place?', they would say, 'No'.

"At the theoretical level it could happen, but people don't make decisions now for what might happen in 50 years' time," Malcolm said.

One man goes alone:

One man taking a more proactive approach to the subject is head of the List for Natural Albania, based in Tirana, who is presenting a lawsuit of approximately 40 pages to the International Court of Justice, ICJ.

Koco Danaj is currently finalising the lawsuit's two main demands: union of Albanian lands and compensation of 100 billion pounds for damages caused by a century of territorial division.

In an interview with the Albanian news agency, lajmet-shqip.com, Danaj said the lawsuit was against the London Conference of 1912 and 1913, which arranged for the partition of Albanian land among Albania, Serbia and Montenegro.

Danaj said that the six powers attending at the meeting "satisfied our neighbours by giving them Albanian territories".

The reason why he is seeking 100 billion pounds in compensation is because, according to Ottoman documents, the wealth of the partitioned territories at that time had a value of about a billion pounds a year.

Neither Kosovo's nor Albania's government had contributed to or supported the lawsuit, Danaj explained.

He was doing it all privately, because everyone has the right to submit legal document to the ICJ. "It's a problem that belongs to the Albania of today or of the future, and to Kosovo's government too," Danaj said.

The London Conference of London

The London Conference of 1913 assembled representatives of six great powers: Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy, which gathered to resolve problems resulting from the break-up of the Ottoman Empire following the Balkan wars.

It began work on December 17, 1912, under the direction of the Britain's Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey.

On May 30, 1913, an agreement was reached under which Ottoman Turkey gave up all territory west of the Enos-Midia line.

Regarding Albania, the ambassadors initially wanted an

autonomous state, still under the overall sovereignty of the Ottoman Sultan.

After much discussion, they decided in favour of a sovereign state, but within very limited borders. Austria lobbied hard for the inclusion in Albania of western Kosovo, but found itself blocked by Serbia's ally, Russia. Britain expressed very little interest one way or the other.

This 54th meeting of the conference on July 29, 1913, provided the basis for the international recognition for Albanian independence.

That Britain's government or public knew anything at all about Albania was largely down to one-

woman Albania campaigner Edith Durham who spent much of the first decade of the 20th century in Shkodra, from where she bombarded the British media and politicians with articles and appeals on Albania and rounding up MPs behind her cause.

Unable to make any headway against Russia over the future of Kosovo, Durham raced south in the summer of 1913, telegramming the London Conference from Korçë to tell the powers that Greek claims to the town were bogus - partly as a result of which the border was shifted south by 20 miles or so and Korçë saved for Albania.



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Kosovo Passports to be Accepted by Serbia



By Bojana Barlovac

A new round of negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina, expected on Saturday, may result in agreements on greater freedom of movement between the two estranged countries.

Milivoje Mihajlovic, head of the Serbian government's information bureau, told Prishtina Insight that the fifth round of Belgrade-Prishtina talks is likely to result in closure of a "chapter" on freedom of movement between the two peoples.

"This is something that the two sides have been agreeing on lately," Mihajlovic said.

Freedom of movement should mean that Kosovo nationals can enter Serbia using Kosovo IDs and passports. Serbian custom officers will not stamp Kosovo passports, however, as that would imply Serbia recognising Kosovo's inde-

pendence.

Kosovo Serbs have still complained loudly, dubbing the move, if it happens, as Serbia's "de facto" recognition of Kosovo's 2008 independence.

Belgrade denies this. Borislav Stefanovic, chief of Serbia's negotiation team, said: "Belgrade will not in any way recognise, nor confirm the independence of Kosovo."

For the first time since Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in February 2008, the two sides sat down together in Brussels under EU auspices on March 8 and 9.

Since then, four rounds have been held on topics varying from freedom of movement, the cadastre, civil registry books, and mutual recognition of college diplomas.

But no "chapters" in the talks have yet been closed, which is supposed to happen in the fifth round. Serbia has been delaying the start of the fifth round since June. The Kosovo side has suggested that this is because Belgrade does not want to sign any agreements.

However, the two sides were in



touch via video conferences in June, trying to find solutions on open issues.

Ahead of the fifth round, Edita Tahiri, Chief of the Kosovo negotiation team, said she expected Serbia to recognize Kosovo customs stamps and license plates,

when the two sides finally met.

When it comes to telecommunications, Tahiri said that Serbian mobile and fixed telephony will stop including Kosovo as Serbia, while "roaming on favourable terms" would be introduced instead.

Prishtina School has One Blackboard for Two Classes

Teachers at one Prishtina school are forced to teach two age groups at the same time



By Edona Musa

Parents and teachers at a school in Prishtina are concerned that pupils in different age groups are being taught at the same time, in the same classroom, with the same blackboard.

One teacher told Prishtina Insight that the students found it very difficult to follow classes as a result, and parents said that their children's education was suffering as a result.

Because the school only has 80 students, teachers are forced to take classes at the same time.

Teacher Nazmi Islami said: "A single blackboard is being used for both student groups and this is hard to manage."

"Usually, when we are teaching the students of fourth grade, those of second grade raise a question and therefore the situation becomes difficult for the students as well."

"We do not have enough time to work with all students and the class is so noisy for them to do the class work."

Parent Avdi Aliu said: "The school infrastructure is very good, but the problem is that in



the same classroom, at the same time, the teacher gives a 20 minute lecture for the students of first grade and 20 other minutes for the students of third grade.

"It is very difficult for our children to be focused on the learning process, since they hear also the lectures of the different grade."

Education expert Halim Hyseni said: "These children are being victimized, since they are not being prepared for further education at all."

"Unfortunately, these children

will be unable to compete with others in the future. They are being punished as a result of no fault of their own, since they cannot learn from their peers or socialise with them."

"If someone builds a school, it does not necessarily mean that they have provided all required parameters which are indispensable for a qualitative education."

Aliu added: "I think that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should be blamed for this situation, since they are

building schools, but do not care if the learning process is being effective or not."

Ragip Gjoshi, political advisor to the education minister: "I cannot judge the investments of MEST. By pedagogical rules, the combined lectures are allowed, but it depends a lot on the teaching techniques of the teacher. The learning process should be creative; therefore, teachers should be able to help students engage in the learning processes."

Editor's Word

Lindje



By Lawrence Marzouk

I've been away for a few editions tending to the birth, or Lindje in Albanian, of my first, second and third child at the same time.

Yes, I am now the proud father of triplets, and they are as adorable and demanding as you would imagine.

My new life under the merciless rule of the terrible triumvirate seems to revolve mostly around inspecting poo and trying to fathom the meaning of a particular cry or smile.

Parents often marvel at their new arrivals, cooing about the 'birth of an angel'. Well, in my case it feels more like the birth of a triangle. Obtuse, of course.

The girls may be a little difficult to comprehend for the moment, but one thing that has become crystal clear to me in the past months is how very, very lucky I have been to be able to rely on the UK's National Health Service.

Hana, Miriam and Corinna spent six weeks under the amazing care of the special care nurses at Pembury Hospital, Tunbridge Wells, as they were born prematurely, as almost all triplets are.

So when news broke last month that children in Prishtina's main hospital were being deprived of even the most basic tests to detect cancer, I have to say I was particularly susceptible to their plight.

I have been wanting to use Prishtina Insight as a means to encourage us international, rich visitors to Kosovo to contribute a little more to society than servicing the capital's well stocked bars and restaurants, and this appeared to be the perfect opportunity.

Of course there are many worth causes and many of you will have persuasive arguments why money would be better spent here or there.

Ultimately, however, there is no perfect cause or charity, no campaign which is beyond reproach.

But raising money to secure reagents for the hospital does meet some important criteria: it will result in a tangible good which can be accounted for, reagents for the tests to be carried out; it will be given to a well run charity, Help for Children with Cancer; and, most importantly, it will help save children's lives.

We are currently distributing collection boxes to those willing to take them and would welcome more requests from organisations and businesses so we can try to raise as much money as possible.

So please dig deep, and help save a child's life. It could be yours one day.

Rexhepi: "I was asked to Make

Former Kosovo Central Bank Governor, Hashim Rexhepi, has said that corruption allegations against him are part of a political plot and reveals details of the pressure placed on him by senior government figures to carry out illegal activities



By Jeta Xharra

Jeta Xharra: 11 months ago we all saw your dramatic arrest on TV, which to me was very movie like the 'Bank Governor Arrested' headline. This was the first action of the Anticorruption Task Force, and the reports seemed like some cool cowboy action movie. Does it continue to be so?

Hashim Rexhepi: I often have that TV story in my mind, to this day, unluckily. How much cowboy-like it was, as you put it, or how much of a premeditated plot it was you can tell me.

Q: Why was it a premeditated plot, from whom and how? Give me the facts you have Mr Rexhepi, as you've had 11 months to reflect upon many things, three of which were spent in prison. What facts do you have to show to the public to prove that this is a plot?

A: I am a responsible person with a great deal of experience, and it wouldn't be a problem for me to, if requested by authorities, present myself and clarify things with them. But, my arrest taking place in such a dramatic way suggests nothing else to me but a premeditated act. In saying this, I take into consideration the developments at that time in Kosovo.

Q: What was happening then that could prove it was a plot planned against you? Explain these events?

A: Firstly, I think the political moment was that it had been six months that EULEX was carrying out investigations into different institutions, and the citizens were awaiting their outcome. Thus, my arrest would surely have helped someone trying to deliver the message "we (the government) are fighting corruption". Secondly, I think that it was very easy to arrest me, since I wasn't affiliated with any political party. I had no one to back me, I was only an expert who managed the Central Bank. I had no support in that regard.

Q: However, it was politics that brought you there, right?

A: The Central Bank is an independent body reporting directly to the Parliament, and its operational independence is guaranteed by legislation covering the Central Bank. Thus, occasional interventions taking place at the Central Bank and my rejection of them was certainly not appreciated, hence someone may have thought 'Hashim is unacceptable'.

Q: So, 'Hashim Rexhepi was unacceptable' you say? When did you start seeing indications of that? And, I'm asking you a direct question - what favours did you not do for the politicians that began to make you unacceptable for the politicians. What requests were you subjected to?

A: I must refer back to an almost three-year period. It is easy to see that the whole period was a continuous campaign against the governor and the Central Bank, attacking various issues, over which the Bank actually had no authority.

Q: Remind us again, what issues were you attacked over?

A: Simply...I would like to mention only three issues, I wouldn't like to spill everything here, I think. There was an open campaign against the Bank, particularly on the issue that the Central Bank hadn't allowed privatisation funds to return to Kosovo, which was developed by the Kosovo Privatisation Agency and its head, trying to blame it on the Central Bank. The Central Bank served the KPA as a regular client.

Q: Then, who didn't want the money returned to Kosovo, if not you?

A: Based on privatisation legislation, it is exclusively up to the Board of the Privatisation Agency and no one else. In that case, the



Central Bank could take actions, if having received an instruction from the KPA board with a clear description of its aims with the funds.

Q: Let's clear something up: the KPA declared publicly that it wants the money to return to Kosovo but it is not being allowed to do so by the Central Bank? Have they sent you an official request for the Bank to return those funds?

A: There was a letter which I received from the board president of the KPA, a very general letter, not specific at all.

Q: What did that letter contain, exactly?

A: It said: "return the money to Kosovo", without specifying clearly where or how, and without sitting down to discuss issues regarding the added costs and risks should the bank return those funds. I have invited the KPA board president for a meeting over this.

Q: What did you say to him: "Where should I move the money to?"

A: To discuss the fact that the instruction needed clarifying in order to know what the decision was.

Q: In other words, in what banks was the money to be returned?

A: Funds could not have been returned anywhere else except the Central Bank. According to the law, the Central Bank cannot make investments in secondary banks. This is why I have asked for another meeting, but I was told over the phone "not to bother with this". I have also sent an official request to have the issue clarified.

Q: Secondly, what else happened to you, what other indications were there?

A: There was an early warning, if I may call it so. Back in the time

of the restructuring of the government, the story went into the public domain that the "bank governor, Hashim Rexhepi, must be discharged" and that allegedly "he violated the law". This sort of preceded the goings on later on. But, the Central Bank law very clearly sets out how a governor of a Central Bank is appointed or discharged.

Q: Tell us, an early warning from whom and in what way?

A: Well, it was reported in the media, it was reported on Klan Kosova television and other printed media; and there were statements by spokespersons of the Prime minister's and the President's office which tried to deny it, generally speaking.

Q: And what followed after this?

A: Well, how to say, there were actions and requests which I rejected, or against which I tried to protect the Central Bank and the law. The requests ranged from matters of staffing, to requests for licensing financial institutions, all the way to requests for funds managed by the Bank to be invested in certain institutions, through to requests coming by certain groups.

Q: Before we go on, let me ask you: has anyone ever told you that you must resign?

A: There was a case when this was said to me, with a degree of anger, and this happened sometime in 2009, following my refusal to invest some funds on the basis that the law of the Central Bank strictly defines the rules on investing the funds it manages.

Q: Tell us about the moment when you refused the transfer of funds. Who exactly asked you to do so, where were you and in what manner was it requested of you?

A: It happened in 2009, we were at a conference of the EBRD in London, and on the second day there I was told by the Minister of Finance not to plan anything in the evening because we were to meet certain investors.

Q: The Minister of Finance, Ahmet Shala?

A: Yes. Naturally out of respect and in order for mutual coordination, I did so, but in the evening I was told that the Minister was busy so I was to go in order for the meeting not to fail. To my surprise, there were no investors in the room. There was an advisor to the Minister, who made that request to me.

Q: We know that in that time, the advisor to the Minister of Economy was an Israeli guy with the name of Ariel, right?

A: Yes.

Q: What did he ask from you exactly? You went there expecting investors, but found the minister's advisor. What did he say?

A: Well Jeta, I won't go into details today, I will surely explain them somewhere else. It was a decisive request. I was told that since we had enough funds under our management, that it would be good if we invested the funds into certain banks as per their recommendation, and that we would all be satisfied. I said no. The law is such that we have an investment commission which knows that this is a time of crisis and so on and thus we are very careful in how the Central Bank manages the public funds. For your public's information, at that time we were working a lot with the Deutsche Bundesbank, the Central Bank of France and that of Luxemburg, for reasons of security in funds investment as well as to make sure there's no risk of eventual losses of our funds. I believe we have done a great job in that, and never have we lost a single cent of the funds.

Q: What bank did he ask you to put the funds into?

A: It wasn't specifically mentioned, but after my rejection, the conversation was just dropped.

Q: I'm very curious to know his reaction. How did that advisor react?

A: He was quite nonchalant, if I may say so, but he was probably

I have always tried to obey the law, but in this case, a small exception was made.

A: Jeta, is there any mother on earth that would carry drugs to her children, even if they are users?

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Illegal Transfer by PM Advisor”

only relaying a message to what he thought was the right destination.

Q: And following that the media campaign began?

A: After this came what you mentioned earlier, which was a surprise to me.

Q: That's when you were told 'to leave'?

A: I asked for a face to face meeting to clarify things, but that's how it happened.

Q: Another detail that has now come out in the media is of the moment you were asked to license an insurance company. Tell us about this moment and why you didn't carry out this request from politicians, and who was it that made the requests?

A: Look Jeta, the Central Bank has precise rules and licensing procedures. Without meeting the criteria, no one can obtain a licence. Normal procedures must be followed.

Q: Ok, who asked?

A: There was an application by an insurance company, I think the name was 'Evropa Ins [United Ins]', and the case was reviewed by the relevant directory, who, in a meeting with the review commission presented clearly that the company did not qualify for licensing, due to problems in meeting the criteria.

Q: Why? Because the owners were under investigation?

A: There were issues with the ownership structure, issues regarding capital, police record checks saying that...

Q: That they didn't pass the test?

A: That the record checks of three members proposed for management yielded a negative result due to the fact that they had been engaged in criminal activity.

Q: Which of our politicians came to you to get a licence for the company?

A: I think the audience knows

this already, but I can reveal once again.

Q: Confirm once again, please?

A: It was minister Shala and the mayor of Skenderaj, Mr Lushtaku.

Q: Again, minister Shala comes to lobby for someone who hasn't met the conditions. What arguments did they use when they asked for licences? What did they say?

A: This meeting took place in the Central Bank, besides me there were the Deputy Governor, Senior Licensing Officer and the Licensing Director; and the problem was stated there, that the company does not meet licensing conditions, and that we couldn't proceed further without that. Their argument was that they allegedly wanted to attract foreign investors and so on, however, it seems that they weren't happy with this strict and lawful attitude of the Bank.

Q: I really want to know how it feels when politicians at that level, a Finance Minister and a Mayor go to a Bank to ask for a request to be carried out, and not to one official, but four, as you say - is there an atmosphere of fear? Are you frightened?

A: No. The Central Bank of Kosovo has managed to build its capacity and the overall management was clearly defined, therefore the staff felt confident in their professional attitude. As for fear - absolutely no. We had principles, and if we were afraid or something like that, we would have probably have done something illegal, which would be worse than what happened.

Q: And, what was the reaction of the then-Minister. What did he say?

A: There were no direct reactions to us, but what was said outside the meeting room, I don't know.

Q: However, Mr Rexhepi, the

charges against you are serious. This may all be true, but the accusations against you, they are still in effect and show money laundering tax evasion, bribery, misuse of official post, exercising of pressure. They say that you have real estate in Albania, they say that you got people employed in insurance companies. Pick one which is true?

A: I will use this occasion once again to discuss the charges, or better to say suspicions, since we cannot say charges. They were fabricated in such a manner to leave an impression to the public as if we're dealing with a criminal who has done nothing but illegal activity.

Q: Which of them have been confirmed by now, after 11 months, by the prosecution?

A: None of the suspicions raised holds water.

Q: Has any indictment been made so far?

A: No, absolutely not. For 11 months now. I have very little information from the authorities involved in this issues, as they are very closed. But, I am very confident in my work and I am certain that there are no grounds for any of the charges.

Q: However, you are not naive and you do have your ties with internationals, as there have been some internationals who have spoken on your behalf, and you must certainly have discovered what happened in your case, after 11 months, as you must have been trying to get answers on your case. What's going on in the Special Prosecution after 11 months?

A: It is my first experience with the justice system, with investigation and prosecution and so on, and from what I have witnessed in these 11 months, I am utterly disappointed. Disappointed first of all, in the inefficiency, the unprofessionalism and the lack of trans-

parency.

Q: Give me an example?

A: There are many examples.

Q: Give me two?

A: Firstly, there was no will on the side of authorities, and this is what showed to me that my arrest was orchestrated, to verify the evidence before making the decision for the arrest. It would have been so easy to verify the evidence since it deals with financial systems which contain data and records.

Q: For example? What could they have verified, which they didn't?

A: They could have easily, for example, verified the issue regarding the loan.

Q: They say that you took a loan while you were governor of the Bank, at a value of 20,000 euro.

A: No, I wasn't governor then. That was in late 2005.

Q: Can you tell me how much the loan was?

A: 23,000 euro, it was for my personal needs, as I had started the construction of my home.

Q: This was part of the charges, yes?

A: Yes, and it was an issue that could have been verified extremely easily, in one day, with a simple check.

Q: How many houses do you own in Albania?

A: None, none at all. Never owned one, nor did my family.

Q: No real estate, no home?

A: Absolutely not.

Q: Not even property registered to someone else in the family?

A: Absolutely not. My lawyer was able to collect evidence and proof from the Albanian authorities, within a very short time, which proved that I don't own [property] in Albania, and never have done.

Q: Another charge against you was for getting 28 people hired by an insurance company. Who are they?

A: Just imagine that. What is implied is that the Association of Insurance Companies, which is a completely independent authority, with its own governing bodies...

Q: But, you could have had influence as you were governor, others would be honoured to hire the people you send.

A: Absolutely not. I never got involved with issues like that nor did I exercise any influence.

Q: See, if the Prime minister's advisor can tell you to put money in a bank, you can also tell insurance companies to hire people for you.

A: I am not such a person and I have not been involved in such matters. I am not certain if the Association of Insurers even has 28 people working there. They are an organisation on their own, with their governing bodies and their procurement.

Q: Tell me then, who said this about you? What witness said these things about you, are they credible? Or were they only from anonymous letters?

A: Most of the charges were

based on anonymous letters. I was never made aware who the accusers were.

Q: However, it is not possible for the prosecution not to have a witness, for 11 months now.

A: There have been many witnesses. They took almost all board members, company directors, I have seen their interviews and none of them reported witnessing anything.

Q: None of the board members or any others witnessed you stealing money?

A: There was nothing to witness, they only wanted to speculate, because I was not involved in such matters.

Q: Ok, were you present in the interviews?

A: I am not an expert in the legal field to discuss procedures, but I will mention one case in which the prosecutor and the investigators blatantly violated the criminal procedure code.

Q: Why?

A: Because one of the so-called key 'witnesses', who was also one of the main actors in preparing the charges, not only did he prevent me from participating and asking questions, which I am entitled to by law, but so did his lawyers. At times, they would say the interview is to take place at a certain hour and when the hour came they would say that it was postponed for another day, only to find out that the person was seen hanging out with the prosecutor and investigator in a restaurant. Afterwards, they said that they finished the interview.

Q: You say it's a violation? Does the accused have the right to be present in the interview, or only the lawyer?

A: According to the criminal procedure code of Kosovo, the accused has the right to sit in an interview. However, if the witness makes a request for the suspect not to be present, the attorney must definitely be there.

Q: Maybe they were scared of you, Mr Rexhepi?

A: I don't know. I am not a person who has caused any injustice to anyone, but professionally they must have felt very bad because they are unable to prove their insinuations.

Q: Again, on the same issue about hiring people. I must mention something, although you're saying you didn't carry out some requests from politicians but you did do some. We must not be naive, since we live in a Kosovo where things happen the way they do. You have certainly been involved in this, being a leader of a major institution. All institutions have some pressure for getting people into jobs, from PTK[Post Telecommunications of Kosovo] all the way to RTK [Radio Television of Kosovo]. It is impossible for you not to have had some pressure of hiring people and not to have carried out a few requests.

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CBK Case: Himaj Investigation Dropped



By Petrit Collaku

The investigation against Shkendije Himaj, the director of supervision at the Central Bank of Kosovo, has been dropped after almost a year because of a lack of evidence.

Himaj had been suspended from her job at the bank in July 2010 after EULEX and Kosovo's Special Prosecution Office launched raids on the institutions, and in particular the governor Hashim Rexhepi.

But a probe by Prishtina Insight, published in May, revealed serious problems with the investigation and questions

over whether Himaj and Rexhepi were the victims of a political plot.

Kosovo's prosecution has now confirmed to Himaj that the investigation has been dropped and she has returned to work.

She told Prishtina Insight: "I can confirm that the case against me has been dropped and that justice has finally been done.

"Now, I would like to see those who have made these false accusations against me investigated so that these people are not allowed to ruin anybody else life as they have done to me."

The case against Rexhepi is still ongoing and Isabel Arnal, the EULEX prosecution whose time at the mission is about to end, told the Prishtina daily Koha Ditore



that an indictment against the former governor would be lodged at the court this summer.

Rexhepi: "I was asked to Make Illegal Transfer by PM Advisor"

from page 5

A: I wanted to state in the beginning that there have been some cases, but I will not elaborate them in detail.

Q: Have you hired anyone through a request from politicians?

A: There was one single case in the Bank, which was reviewed by the relevant commission, and there has been an outside intervention to hire an individual, and the board supported it.

Q: Who intervened?

A: It was from the Prime Minister directly.

Q: So, a person was hired. But did the new employee meet all the conditions?

A: According to the commission, the candidate was relatively qualified.

Q: Obviously he had a strong recommendation. Then, this person became Head of the Insurance Department at the CBK, his name is Agron Ramadani, right?

A: Yes.

Q: So then, it accidentally happens that the same person is one of the witnesses against you?

A: Unfortunately so.

Q: How is that possible? The person employed through a Prime minister's intervention has now turned against you?

A: Not only that. Several of the witnesses that the prosecution gathered, were people who, in one way or another, had been subject of reprimand or other measure by the Central Bank.

Q: Do you have evidence that these measures were taken?

A: Yes, I have it here.

Q: What document do you have that shows you've taken measures against these persons?

A: Certainly, we've had a document from an insurance company containing serious complaints regarding this person's interference in their day to day operations. I have sent this document to the General Inspector and to the prosecution for verification.

Q: Hold on a second - the person that the Prime Minister helped get a job with you, had started to put pressure on the insurance companies to cover damages, is this what you're saying?

A: It was about damage insurance. The ethical code of the Central Bank does not allow this, and we have always ensured that such interventions don't happen.

Q: I really want to know if you spoke to Mr Ramadani. What has he said?

A: We met a couple of days before the arrest, he tried to deny that...

Q: Did he say "I didn't do it" or did he say he was just doing his job?

A: He said he did it for the interest of insurance, which is why I sent the file to the relevant Bank department for verification.

Q: So, we know where the 11 months of investigation lead to. You were arrested and imprisoned with no indictment for 11 months. But what about this guy who is alleged to have been responsible for wrongdoing inside the bank - what did the bank inspection do? Does he still work there?

A: Yes. I was arrested a few days later, I have no information about the fate of the complaint.

Q: That's what happens when you carry out favours for politicians! So, you see! You hire a person in that fashion and it boomerangs back against you. That's how unprofessionalism functions.

A: I wouldn't call it unprofessionalism. I have always tried to obey the law, but in this case, a small exception was made.

Q: I'm bringing up the charges once again. One of the charges is that your son was one of the owners of a company, which won a tender for computer software to be supplied to the Insurers Association. Is this true?

A: Look Jeta, I wouldn't go into detail about this as I have explained this to the investigators and prosecutors. I wasn't at all aware.

Q: You weren't aware, but please explain: Your son is shareholder in the company?

A: My son is a shareholder in Kreako with 19 percent shares and this company had applied for a bid by the Insurers Association, for a computer application, and the Association had independently decided to go with their application.

Q: Are you really the victim, Mr Rexhepi, that you make out to be?

A: I am certain I am a victim, and I have full confidence that it will be revealed. Life seems to offer up many tests.

Q: Before we close, I have one question to ask you, Mr Rexhepi. I know it's hard to ask you this. It will be the last question. Many people thought that after you had a problem with your son being involved in a murder, you should have resigned since you have a public position. There are others who say that the children are grown up and over 18, and we can't all have total control over our children. However, have you ever had the dilemma that perhaps you should have resigned?

A: Jeta, I have never spoken

publicly about this issue, especially in the post I held during that time. I am seriously sorry that such a thing had happened and that there was a victim.

Q: You are saying that a young boy was murdered, and your son was involved?

A: It wasn't only my son, there were many others, and I am waiting for the justice to have its final say on the case, as you may remember the headlines, there was an attempt to portray it badly through statements like "the governor's son".

Q: Has your son receive any sentence for this?

A: No, the procedure is still ongoing after two years and five months now, and the hearings have not finished yet, but I am optimistic that justice will have its say.

Q: Some of the others involved are not here, they escaped to the US, right?

A: It is true that on that night, which was New Year's morning, two persons were witnessed being involved directly. They have escaped to the US.

Q: What does your son say? Does he say he did it or that the others did it?

A: To this day, my son is certain that he did not murder.

Q: Did he see who did?

A: One of the key witnesses has seen the event, and he has given his testimony.

Q: Have you spoken to the family?

A: I haven't had the chance. Of course, I have sent them my condolences, I felt really bad as if my son was murdered, in fact, it could have been him. It was an accident. The parties didn't know each other at all. Therefore, I want to believe that justice will be served.

Q: I know it's a bit personal,

but I want to address all rumours about you, Mr Rexhepi. The last rumour. The story goes that your wife was caught carrying drugs in prison, taking it to your sons. Is this true?

A: Jeta, is there any mother on earth that would carry drugs to her children, even if they are users?

Q: Maybe so, I don't know.

A: My sons were never drug users. In fact, I never went to visit my sons at that time. I spoke to my children on the phone and told them I would go and visit them.

Q: Tell me, was anything found or not?

A: My wife went together with two people to visit my children. Checking procedures were not carried out well that day as officers normally check everything you bring in. My wife was told to just go ahead inside and to leave the stuff there. She went in to see our son, and then as she moved to see our other son, some officers came and said that they found drugs inside her pocket.

Q: And they found the drugs without her being present?

A: Absolutely. This was a huge trauma for my wife, for everyone who was inside there and for me. A very bad image was created of my family, and my family is not like that, Jeta. Absolutely not. We're a very normal family. We're an intellectual family, a motivated one.

Q: Did you have any proposals from politicians to get your sons out of there?

A: I wouldn't talk about that Jeta. Although there has been something of that.

Agron Ramadani, who works at the Central Bank of Kosovo, has refused to give a statement to BIRN regarding the allegations.

New Tax on Serbian, Bosnian Imports Questioned

Kosovo government has warned that from the beginning of July it will begin to apply an import duty on Serbian and Bosnian products in response to these countries embargo of Kosovo goods



By Lavdim Hamidi

Economy experts believe that the 10 per cent import duty imposed on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina products from July 1 will hit mainly hit Kosovo consumers.

The action is being taken in response to Serbia and Bosnia's boycott of goods stamped 'Republic of Kosovo' since the declaration of independence, in contravention of the Central and Eastern European Trade Agreement.

"Kosovo should reply back to Serbia with reciprocity, an embargo, and not with a duty of 10 per cent more for their goods, since the consequences of such a tax will be picked up by the Kosovo consumers, and not by Serbian producers," said the economy pro-

fessor Nagip Skenderi.

Professor Skenderi said he was concerned that businesses in Kosovo would take advantage of the situation by hiking the price of products beyond the 10 per cent.

"Shopkeepers may manipulate the price of products by increasing those prices by 20 per cent even though the tax would be only 10 per cent, and they will still blame the government for the increase," he said.

He insists that this tax will not affect the producer from Serbia, but the consumer from Kosovo.

Muhamet Sadiku, economy expert, says that this situation has emerged from the non-functionality of the Central European Free Trade Agreement, CEFTA, an agreement which, according to him, appears to be applicable for some countries, and for some other not.

Sadiku said the best option available to Kosovo is reciprocity,

since even when Kosovo's exports were allowed to enter in Serbia, they represented just 15 million euro per year, while the imports from Serbia is worth around 290 million euro and 80 million euro from Bosnia.

"Even the World Trade Organization considers reciprocity as a legitimate tool, thus it should be used," claims Sadiku.

He admits that the application of this tax will increase inflation in the country. On the other hand, the deputy prime minister of Kosovo and the

Minster for Trade and Industry, Mimoza Kusari-Lila, is confident that



from the beginning of July the 10 per cent duty will only affect consumers that do not want to replace goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with products from elsewhere.

"Only those consumers who at any cost want to consume goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will a face price increase of 10 per cent, as there will be other goods from other countries which will replace the goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina," said Kusari-Lila.

Kosovo currently relies on Serbia for wheat, and therefore bread. "We will be following the situation in the market, regarding the supply of goods, in order not to create a trade shock," she added, explaining that the construction of the highway Kosovo-Albania makes the import process of goods from other European countries much simpler.

Experts Warn of Prishtina-Skopje Highway Costs

Kosovo Government has announced its plans to build a highway connecting Prishtina and Skopje, but experts warn that the country's budget is already too overstretched.



By Lavdim Hamidi

Kosovo's government has announced a new, expensive road construction project, despite its existing commitment to build the country's first highway, which is already straining the budget.

The government had planned to finance the Prishtina-Skopje highway through a public-private partnership, but it has been advised by French firm Egis that this is not viable.

Earlier this month, the country's cabinet announced that it planned to press on with the scheme despite with funding coming from the national budget.

American-Turkish consortium Bechtel Enka is currently constructing Kosovo's first highway, which will connect Kosovo to

Albania and Serbia, at a cost of between 700 million euro and 1 billion euro.

Experts warn that the move could bankrupt the country.

Until 2007, Kosovo's budget was characterised by budget surpluses of more than 7 per cent, but in 2010 the budget deficit was 2.6 per cent because of increased capital expenditures on the new highway.

This year's deficit is expected to reach up to 5 per cent of the GDP.

Because of increased budget expenditure, and in particular spending on the road and an increase in the salaries of civil servants, the International Monetary Fund stopped the 18 month programme with the Government of Kosovo, the so called "Stand-by Arrangement", which has deprived the country of 150 million euro in grants and loans.

In the IMF's assessment of



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Kosovo's economy it said: "New spending initiatives need to be costed thoroughly, and their accommodation requires higher

revenues or expenditure cuts elsewhere.

"Importantly, the government plans another highway from Prishtina to Skopje/Macedonia, for which a sound financing plan is an indispensable prerequisite."

"The French consulting company Egis, recommended that this highway not be built through a public-private partnership," confirmed Lah Nitaj, the advisor to the Minister of Infrastructure, Fehmi Mujota.

Nitaj told Prishtina Insight that the tender will be announced for expression of interest for construction of the road in July, where, according to him, experts within this ministry will review the possibilities of funding funds.

The construction of this road is also foreseen in the Ministry of Finance's long-term spending plans, where it is noted that work on 'Route 6' is supposed to start in the last quarter of 2012 and will take three years.

Lumir Abdixhiku, executive director of the Institute Riinvest, said that construction

of this highway cannot happen with budget money, since this is not in accordance with the budget forecasts.

According to him, Kosovo cannot find 600 million euro for this highway, when the Vermice-Merdare route is expected to cost 1 billion euro.

"There is definitely no chance it can be funded with budget money, as the country's financial stability is under question even with the highway that has already started being constructed," claimed Abdixhiku.

Advisor Nitaj, however, said that Kosovo Government has considered all these issues and believes the project can be completed without risking the financial stability of the country.

Abdixhiku added: "If it is planned to be built with budget money, then Kosovo risks entering a deeper budget crisis than Greece."

The highway Prishtina-Skopje will be 55 km long and will have 2 tunnels. The longest tunnel will be built in Kacanik, 2.2 km meters long.



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Kosovo Trails in World Bank Business League

Skopje leads the region in terms of best city in which to start a business, a new report says, whereas Prishtina is at the bottom of the Balkan table



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

Skopje and the Bosnian Serb city of Banja Luka have emerged well from the World Bank's regional report, "Doing business in South East Europe".

The report surveys business performance of 22 cities from seven countries in the region. The report was published this week in Vienna and updates a previous survey done in 2008.

The four benchmarks are: starting a business, handling construction permits, registering property and enforcing contracts.

The report generally pinpoints progress in all of the 19 cities that have been surveyed for a second time, noting that all have progressed at least in one of the surveyed areas.

But only Macedonia's capital, Skopje, and the Bosnian Serb de facto capital of Banja Luka are pinpointed as making progress in all four benchmarks over the past three years.

It takes just three days and a little over 100 US dollars to start up a business in Skopje, the report continues.

The worst in the region for starting businesses are the capital of Kosovo, Pristina, and the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, where entrepreneurs wait almost two months to register their enterprises.

Meanwhile the best city for enforcing a contract appears to be Zrenjanin, in north-eastern Serbia, where commercial disputes are resolved in 10 months on average. The worst for settling

a commercial dispute is Prizren, in Kosovo, where the waiting time usually exceeds four years.

Businessmen face the least difficulty when registering a property in the Moldovan capital, Chisinau, and in the town of Balti in the north of the same country.

The Bosnian town of Mostar is the worst for registering property.

The Montenegrin city of Niksic is marked out as the best for dealing with construction permits. The Serbian capital Belgrade is the worst in this regard.

The survey included cities in

Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia. While Croatia has dropped out since the last survey, Moldova has been added.

"The wide variation in business regulation across the region points to ample room for improvement," states the report.

The report notes that while many business factors depend on the local authorities, governments can also help a great deal by improving regulations, cutting bureaucracy and red tape.

Bulgaria Dreams of Becoming China's Door to Europe

Sofia hopes to market itself as a portal to the EU for Chinese companies – but with Beijing's investment fairly modest so far, it has a way to go.



By Boryana Dzhambazova

On the outskirts of Bahovitsa, a small village in northern Bulgaria, a couple of shiny, brand-new factory halls have recently gone up.

Next to them in a neat row stand the skeletons of two other unfinished buildings, also a part of a complex that Great Wall Motor, a Chinese sports car manufacturer, is building in the country.

The roar of machines and trucks echoes around the site. Construction work, now in full swing, does not stop even over the weekend. Soon the plant will start turning out the first locally produced Chinese cars for the European market.

Meanwhile, in the capital, Sofia, the office of Litex Motors, the local partner to Great Wall Motor, has been buzzing with activity.

Staff has been overwhelmed with

hectic preparations for the ongoing auto exhibition, where the Chinese cars have had their official premiere.

When finished, the car plant is expected to create 3,000 jobs and turn out 50,000 vehicles per year, Litex Motors told Prishtina Insight.

Great Wall Motor's decision to build a factory in Bahovitsa is just one successful example of Bulgaria's drive to lure investment from China.

Sofia, which joined the EU four years ago, wants to make sure that more companies like them set foot in the country, enabling Bulgaria to establish itself as portal for Chinese business in the EU.

But there is a long way to go. As yet, China is not a major foreign investor in Bulgaria. Last year Beijing invested a meagre 4 million euros in Bulgaria. The authorities are determined to change that modest statistic.

Chinese businesses in the country now include producers of glass, air-conditioners, televisions and solar energy. They are also investing in trading and IT.



GREAT WALL В БЪЛГАРИЯ

Bulgaria is slowly emerging from the global economic crisis. Foreign investment, the main motor behind the country's economic boom before the global downturn struck, has plummeted in recent years. As other sources of investment dry up, Bulgarian has eyed Beijing as a potential replacement.

As the second largest economy in the world, investing billions of euros abroad every year, Sofia believes that China could significantly boost Bulgaria's economy and help it recover from the financial slowdown.

On the other hand, as a member

of the EU, Sofia can provide China with access to both regional and European markets.

The Balkan country is attractive to foreign companies because it combines cheap labour and low taxes with inexpensive start-up costs.

The Sofia authorities believe Bulgaria has the potential to market itself as a main entry point to the bigger European market for China.

Evgeni Angelov, deputy minister of economy, told Prishtina Insight that Bulgaria sees China as a strategic partner and Sofia intends to pay special attention to improving economic cooperation with Beijing.

Chinese companies find Bulgaria as an attractive place to do business, he claimed.

"Bulgaria has the potential to position itself as a gateway for Chinese business at European market," Angelov said, adding that Sofia should take advantage of China's plans to expand abroad.

While the construction of the Bahovitsa plant advances, the two countries are holding intensive talks on future partnership deals.

At the moment, Bulgaria is trying to lure Chinese companies into putting money into the construction of a new, hi-tech industrial zone near the capital. The government has also invited Beijing to take part in the renovation of Bulgaria's dilapidated railway infrastructure.

Valeri Andreev, head of Industrial Zones, a state company, is currently on a visit to China, holding talks with Chinese officials

businessmen. He explains that Chinese companies don't make quick decisions, so the negotiation process can take a long time.

"At the beginning, Chinese investors are very cautious, but once we manage to attract a couple of companies to start their businesses here, a wave of new investors will follow," Andreev predicts.

He argues that just a few big Chinese investors could markedly improve the economic situation in Bulgaria. Bulgarian officials hope that once they seal the deals with Chinese companies, more capital from other Far Eastern and Asian countries will come.

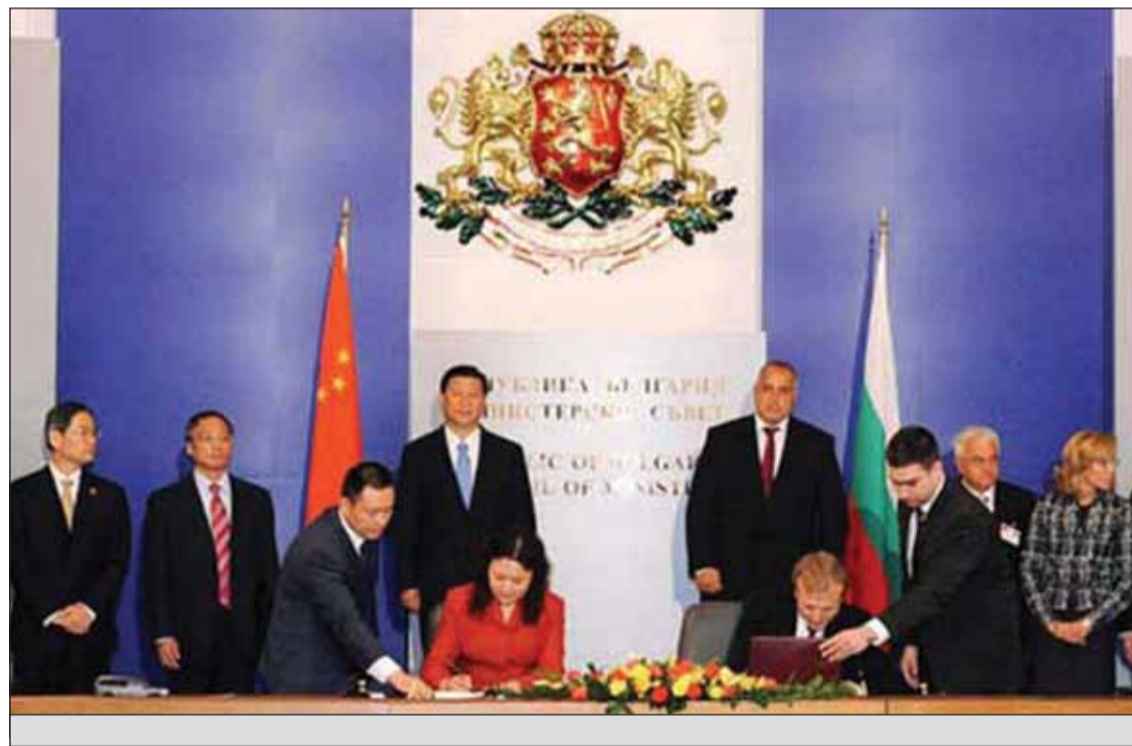
"Over the last year-and-a-half, more than ten Chinese delegations have visited the country, which is a clear sign of their growing interest in Bulgaria," Andreev told Prishtina Insight.

In March, officials and businessmen from one of China's most populated provinces, Hunan, which alone houses around 100 million people, visited the country.

Guangdong, one of China's wealthiest provinces, has also shown interest in Bulgaria. Teams from the province have visited Sofia three times this year.

Lu Yongming, an economic and commercial counselor at the Chinese embassy in Sofia, believes that more Chinese investors are on the way.

"Bulgaria has competitive advantages and might become China's gateway to the European market," he said. "After all, the country has the lowest taxes in the bloc."



Work on First Marriott Hotel Begins in Balkans



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

Site preparation works are underway in the centre of the capital, Skopje, for a new five-star Marriott Hotel. Costed at 38 million euros, it will set new standards for luxury on Skopje's hotel scene.

After investors obtained a construction permit for the luxury complex last week, the groundbreaking ceremony is expected soon.

The new 180-room hotel, built by the local Dvelop Grup Dooel, which has the franchise for the Marriott International's iconic business brand, is expected to open in early 2013.

The five-star hotel, which will feature 180 stylish guest-rooms, 16 luxury suites, a presidential suit, spa-centre and top floor garden, will be located on a 20,000-square-metre site in Skopje's main Macedonia square.

The hotel is expected to raise the benchmark for luxury in the Macedonian hotel business, which till now has lacked internationally famous hotel brands.

Marriott International Inc is a worldwide operator and franchisor of a broad portfolio of hotels and related lodging facilities, running nearly 500 hotels in 60 countries.

The art deco design was first shown to the public in 2009 as part of the government-financed revamp plan for the Macedonian capital dubbed "Skopje 2014". It was soon announced that it would be built by private investors.

The "Skopje 2014" project is already underway with dozens of tall buildings and monuments drawing inspiration from the classical styles of Antiquity.



Gruevski Asked to Form Macedonian Government



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

President Gjorge Ivanov on Tuesday entrusted Nikola Gruevski with a fresh mandate to form a new government after his VMRO-DPMNE party won the June 5 elections. He has 20 days to complete talks and present a new team to parliament.

Gruevski will now have 20 days to wrap up talks with his junior ethnic Albanian partner, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, after which his proposed government will be put to a vote in parliament.

Sources from both parties briefed that the sharing of ministerial seats between the two parties was a done deal, and that all that remained now was filling in the ministerial posts with actual candidates.

Vice-Prime Minister Abdulaqim Ademi, of the DUI, said on Monday that a joint government platform had been already agreed.

"For the first time in plural [i.e. democratic] Macedonia, the governmental programme is jointly composed of the electoral programmes of the two parties that won the elections," Ademi said, declining to divulge details.

It is known that the DUI will hold five ministries and will name two vice-prime ministers, an increase on the party's allocation in the last coalition.

The post of Vice-Prime Minister in charge of monitoring the 2001 Ohrid peace deal stays in DUI hands. The deal ended the brief insurrection among Albanians in the west of the country.

The current Vice-Prime Minister, Abdulaqim Ademi, is likely to stay in this post.

The DUI will most likely also get the Vice-Prime Minister in charge of European affairs, which was previously reserved for VMRO-DPMNE. The DUI spokesperson,

Ermira Mehmeti, is mentioned as the most probable choice for this post.

Mehmeti said the initial distribution of posts and ministries in the new government would be 2:1 in favour of the DUI's senior partner. She did not comment on the possibility of her own appointment to the government.

"The DUI during the [government] talks made a detailed and comprehensive analysis about how to fully satisfy the needs of the Albanian community," she recalled. "We have decided to concentrate on the executive power that will ensure proper quantitative and qualitative participation of Albanians in government."

According to unconfirmed party sources, the DUI will also now get the Defence Ministry as well as the Justice Ministry, which previously went to VMRO-DPMNE nominees.

The DUI retains the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Local Governance, as well as having one minister without portfolio.

According to sources, the DUI will also appoint the new head of the Public Revenue Office.

However, it is looking increasingly unlikely that the DUI will get the Finance Ministry, which it wanted. This appears destined for Zoran Stavreski, who occupied this position in the last government.

Another key post, the Police Ministry, will also remain under VMRO-DPMNE. It will most probably be held by the current minister, Gordana Jankulovska, or by the current chief of the Public Revenue Office, Goran Trajkovski.

According to unconfirmed sources, Gruevski is most probably keeping on the Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki, the Transport Minister, Mile Janakieski as well as the Education Minister, Nikola Todorov.

Gruevski is the sixth Macedonian Prime Minister since the country gained independence 20 years ago. He receives the mandate for the third time in a row as he won the 2006



and 2008 elections as well as this year's early elections.

The block led by Gruevski won over 56 of the 123 seats in parliament. Together with the DUI the ruling coalition is expected to have some 70 legislators.

Romania Clamps Down on Cheating Students



By Marian Chiriac

Stricter measures are resulting in a big increase in number of students expelled from exams for cheating in Romania.

Some 233 students all over Romania were expelled on Monday from graduation exams after they were found trying to use various gadgets to copy answers, or crib sheets.

The number is almost double the number compared to last year and reflects an official clampdown on cheating in exams.

Cheating in tests has been always a problem in Romania, but this year the authorities took more serious measures. Security camera systems were installed in 60 out of 71 exam centres across Bucharest alone, while officials supervising exams were instructed to make sure that no students cheated.

"We have launched a policy of zero tolerance for any type of fraud in education. It is necessary to stop this phenomenon, which has for years affected our schools and universities", the education ministry said recently.

Copying during examinations was widespread under the communist regime. After 1990, the lack of jobs made many students determined to graduate with flying colours at any price.

A real industry of gadgets and technology that can be used for cheating during exams has developed in the meantime. Bluetooth ball pens, wireless micro-cameras and touch-screen watches with incorporated memory can all be purchased online.

Almost 22,000 students took exams in Bucharest on Monday, while around 193,000 exams took place across Romania. The exam is crucial as only successful candidates can enter universities.

Serbia Plans to Frighten Smokers Out of Habit

In Serbia, ranked fifth in Europe in terms of the number of smokers, authorities mull fortifying the ongoing anti-smoking campaign by introducing grim images on cigarette packs.



By Bojana Barlovac

A corpse of a smoker and his or her diseased lungs are images that might occupy roughly half the surface of each cigarette pack in Serbia soon.

In a new attempt to discourage Serbians from lighting up, the Health Ministry has announced plans to amend the Tobacco Act so that cigarette packs get graphic warning labels, strengthening people's understanding about the health risks of smoking.

The US authorities have announced plans to make the same move as of September 2012.

Serbia is the fifth "worst" country in Europe in terms of the proportion of smokers. Each year, about 16,000 people in Serbia die of diseases directly related to cigarette

smoking. Ninety six per cent of patients with vocal cord cancer are smokers, while 92 to 95 per cent of patients with lung cancer, are smokers too.

Srmena Krstev, president of the National Commission for Smoking Prevention in the health ministry, says all tobacco manufacturers in Serbia will be obliged to display the pictorial warnings once the changes to the law are adopted.

"We will use photos that are officially allowed by the EU that contribute to reducing smoking," Krstev said.

This is not the first move in the anti-smoking campaign Serbian authorities have made.

As of November last year, Serbs may no longer light up in shopping malls or in any public buildings under the Law to Protect the Population from Exposure to Tobacco Smoke, adopted earlier that year.

The ban covers all indoor workplaces and public spaces connected to the provision of



health and social care and education, including theatres and cinemas.

Offenders face fines ranging from 5,000 dinars [about 50 euro] to a million dinars [about 10,000 euro].

However, Belgrade remains a haven for

smokers in practice, as smoking is still allowed in all the clubs and cafes. Even in the cafes that have a separate room for smokers, the law is being circumvented. Waiting staff often put ashtrays onto tables where they are not supposed to be.

Macedonia Ponders Alexander Effect on Greece

While some fear the new statue will pour oil onto the flames of the 'name' dispute with Greece, other say ties are already so damaged it will make no difference.



By Darko Duridanski

Experts are divided over whether the erection of a huge statue of Alexander the Great in the middle of Skopje on Tuesday will have a damaging effect on relations between Greece and Macedonia - and on Macedonia's EU perspectives.

Professor Stevo Pendarovski, from the University American College, maintains that the government-backed installation of the statue will not harm Macedonian-Greek relations, as they are dismal to start with.

"The erection of the statue is the last part of a project started by the government in 2007, with the renaming of the airport after Alexander the Great," he recalled.

"Since then, the relations between Athens and Skopje have been practically frozen so this can't worsen them," Pendarovski added.

Macedonia's relations with Athens are already strained by a two-decade row over Macedonia's name. Athens says use of the name "Macedonia" implies a territorial claim to the northern Greek province also called Macedonia.

More worryingly for Pendarovski is that this latest move may have cost Macedonia the support of the few friendly

countries that have till now stayed on its side.

"This is an issue with two sides that are not even. Macedonia is the smaller and weaker side," he said.

"That is why the only possibility to get even with Greece was to have friendly supporting states. With the statue, we lose them and put arguments in the hands of the Greek politicians," Pendarovski claimed.

But former foreign minister Slobodan Chasule says Macedonia should not worry too much about the Greek position.

"The statue is a marginal problem for Greece at this moment," he said. "If the people gave the government a mandate to govern, they should not be interested in what others think."

"I can't see why Greece should see this as provocation," he added. "We have to stop worrying about what nationalist politics in Greece have to say."

Chasule told Balkan Insight he believes Macedonia could even get a date to start negotiations on EU membership this year, even though Greece remains firm that without a resolution of the "name" issue, this will not be possible.

"I do not think the monument will have negative influence of Macedonia's EU perspective," he said. "The conditions for using the [1995] Interim Accord are met, so Macedonia can progress towards EU," Chasule added.



He said that because of the Greek economic crisis, no country in the EU is likely to support Greece's demands to continue to block Macedonia.

Macedonia and Greece signed an Interim Accord in 1995 by which they agreed to settle their differences with negotiations on the name issue.

From then until 2008, Greece did not block Macedonia from entering international organizations under the provisional name Former

Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the name under which it is registered in the United Nations.

This Accord was respected until 2008. That year, Greece blocked Macedonia's bid to enter NATO at the Alliance summit in Bucharest. Athens justified its move by accusing Macedonia of trying to steal its history by renaming airports, stadiums and building after Alexander the Great and his father Philip.

Greece considers Alexander the

Great and his legacy an exclusive part of Greek culture and history.

Greek officials have condemned the new statue as provocative, warning that Macedonia is risking its EU perspectives. Citing the unresolved name issue, in 2009 and 2010 Greece blocked Macedonia from getting a start date for negotiations with the EU.

Greek Foreign Ministry spokesman Gregory Delavekouras said that in the light of the ongoing dispute between the two countries over Macedonia's name, the new statue "undermines our bilateral relations and hampers negotiations under the UN" aimed at reaching a compromise.

The EU commissioner for enlargement, Stefan Fule, also warned that the statue could undermine Skopje's EU hopes.

Speaking on Macedonian A1 TV channel, last week Fule said: "If you have a neighbour... and there is an issue between two of you... and you are trying sincerely to solve it, I guess you would avoid doing anything that your neighbour might call a provocation."

"This is simple logic. I would expect the government in Skopje to avoid doing things which would be called by the other side provocations," he said.

Pendarovski says that not only the statue, but the internal crisis in Greece is prompting the Greeks to firm up their stance about the name issue.

His thesis is that Greece's economic problems are only making Athens more inflexible.

"In a situation when the EU countries are asking Greece to take harsh measures and are practically humiliating its government, no one will want to put pressure on Athens to be more flexible on so sensitive a topic as the name issue," Pendarovski predicted.



Basha Declared Winner of Contested Tirana Poll

Albania's Central Electoral Commission has for the second time in as many months declared the ruling party candidate the winner of the hotly contested race for the Tirana mayoralty.



By Besar Likmeta

With four votes in favour and two against, the commission declared Lulzim Basha the winner of the May 8 race for the capital's mayoralty with a 93 vote advantage out of a quarter-million.

"I want to thank all the citizens who made their voices heard and waited patiently for the process to end," the former interior minister said after the result was announced.

"The electoral process soon will end and the work to govern the city will begin," Basha added.

The Tirana poll was considered the key battleground of the May 8 local elections, pitting Basha against the opposition leader and incumbent Tirana mayor, Edi Rama.

Despite Basha's impatience to start work as the city's next mayor, the Socialists are again contesting the commission's ruling and on Sunday they warned that they will ask the Electoral College to annul the poll.

"The Socialist Party and the united opposition believe that the victory for the May 8 poll goes to Edi Rama," Socialist MP Blendi Klosi said.

"Convinced that [Prime Minister] Sali Berisha and [commission head Arben] Ristani ruined this poll in order to hide their loss in Tirana and across the country, we will seek the invalidation of this electoral massacre," Klosi added.

Within five days, the Socialists are expected to lodge a complaint with the Electoral College, a specialized court for election disputes.

The new complaint before the court would be the fourth after the election commission on May 23

initially declared Basha the winner, following a controversial recount of stray ballots.

The recount gave Basha a lead of 81 votes out of a quarter-million over Rama, who had a razor-thin margin of ten ballots in the unofficial preliminary results, before the stray ballots were added.

The dispute over the stray ballots occurred because some voters who had multiple ballots to put into designated boxes failed to do so correctly, partly because the ballot boxes were not clearly distinguished by colour.

On June 13 the Electoral College ruling annulled the election commission's May 23 decision, which declared Basha the winner in Tirana. At the same time, it rejected the opposition challenge against the miscast ballots, which were deemed as valid.

Following the ruling, the court ordered a re-evaluation of contested ballots in 368 ballot boxes, whose results were added to the



final tally, giving Basha a lead of 93 votes.

Earlier the Electoral College had rejected two other Socialist complaints about the procedure used by the election commission to include the miscast ballots in the final tally.

However the Socialists have contested the latest recount as well, pointing to problems in several ballots boxes, where security codes were different from those registered by counting centers or where paper ballots were found outside the various envelopes inside the ballot box.

The May 8 local elections were considered as key for the country's EU future, following a two-year political crisis which has stopped the reform process dead in its tracks.

However, after a peaceful and quiet election day, the row over the miscast ballots has heightened the political climate once again, adding to Brussels' doubts over the country's EU future.

This article was made possible through the support of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Albania Nationalist Party Savours Poll Success

A party representing the Cham expellees from Greece says its strong showing in the local elections will boost the community's hand in demanding resolution of their grievances.



By Dardan Malaj

With the slogan "I Love Albania," and campaigning with a mix of minority and nationalist politics, the Party for Democracy, Unity and Integration, PDIU, was a surprise beneficiary in Albania's May 8 local elections.

According to preliminary results, published by the Central Electoral Commission, the PDIU, which ran as a part of the centre-right coalition of Prime Minister Sali Berisha, gained 65,000 votes in the local poll.

Two years earlier, in the 2009 parliamentary elections, it convinced only 14,000 voters, sending only one deputy to parliament.

After being restructured under a new leadership, the PDIU now ranks as the fifth political party in the country in terms of size, and because its voters are clustered in specific voting areas it may play an important role in the 2013 general election.

Elated by its poll results, the party's leaders say their new political weight will strengthen their bargaining power in the government, enabling them to direct a stronger diplomatic stance toward

Greece to resolve the community's grievances.

The Chams are a sub-group of Albanians who originally resided in the coastal Epirus region of northern Greece.

According to British historian Miranda Vickers, the Chams have a strong sense of tradition, identity and community, which has united them over the past 62 years since their expulsion from Greece.

The Greek authorities accused them of collaborating with the German occupation.

About 250,000 Chams live in Albania and another estimated 400,000 or so live in the wider diaspora, mostly in the US and Turkey.

Despite being granted Albanian citizenship in 1953, many Chams still regard themselves as refugees, unjustly stripped of their Greek citizenship.

The PDIU, often referred to as the "Cham Party," aims to strengthen the pressure on Albanian government, parliament and raise awareness of their cause in international institutions like the United Nations and the European Union.

While their immediate goal is to secure the right to undertake short-term visits to Greece and the reclaim property confiscated by the Greek state, the PDIU has a larger target audience that goes beyond the Cham community.

Styling itself "a patriotic party"

during the local election campaign, it promotes the idea of a sort of ethnic Albanian economic zone in the Balkans.

The party has also been at the forefront of nationalistic disputes with the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, whose Greek Archbishop, Janullatos, is seen by many Albanians as pushing Athens' agenda.

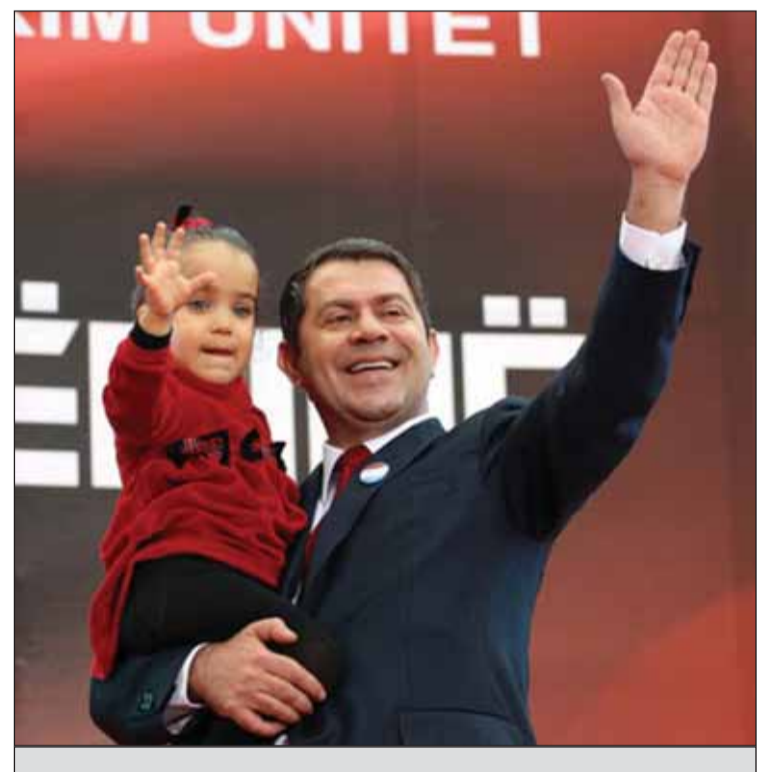
"The mainstream political parties do not represent the national interests as they should, and even other parties that have been created with this objective have done little," the PDIU manifesto says.

Shpetim Idrizi, a former Socialist MP of Cham decent, who left in 2010 to head the PDIU, says the party's broader national platform in the local election campaign extends beyond its core Cham community.

"The voice that we raised has expanded from our ranks and the call was heard among patriots across the country," Idrizi says.

"We were able to break the two-party political scene and were confirmed as the second political force in places like Delvina in the south, or Barjam Curri in the north," he adds.

After coming third in the cities and towns of Durres, Vlora, Fier and Saranda, the party is expected to drive a hard bargain in coalition negotiations ahead of 2013 general elections, as Albania's regional



proportional voting system favours strong voting blocks in specific geographical areas.

"We have 65,000 votes to make right the injustices done toward our nation, starting with the Cham issue," Idrizi says. "These 65,000 wills represent the resolve of the people, which can neither be erased nor ignored."

Gentian Elezi, political science professor at the European University of Tirana, says the PDIU's strong showing at the polls will boost its cause for the Cham minority claims with the government in Tirana and internationally - although not immediately.

"In the short term I don't expect the strengthening of this party to boost... the Cham cause," Elezi said. "But in future, depending on

their representation in government, they may be more able to push their cause onto Albania's political agenda," he added.

Idrizi, the Cham leader disagrees. He says his community will not have to wait long for the party to produce results.

"We have the legitimacy to speak out on the issue at the right time, in the right way and we will do it," he said.

"Over the next two years the Cham issue will be reactivated on a scale that will surprise many, just like many were surprised with our recent successes," he added.

This article was made possible through the support of the National Endowment for Democracy.



Camping and Hiking in Kosovo's

In the run up to my new guide book release (*The Mountains of Dragash, Kosovo: Hiking and Nature Tourism Guide*) I led a group of 30 people into the Dragash back-country for a weekend of hiking, camping, and getting back to nature (ie getting very wet on the hike in and out).

The trip was part of a larger effort to develop a nature tourism strategy for the isolated Municipality of Dragash, and to create a series of value chains to help locals benefit from increased tourism.

Working for the United Nations and as a Travel Blogger/writer has its moments: sometimes they intersect in an amazing experience or opportunity that just leaves me wondering how I ever became so lucky.

If anyone ever tells you a dream job does not exist, share this story with them and then get working on making it come true.

In the run up to my new guide book release (*The Mountains of Dragash, Kosovo: Hiking and Nature Tourism Guide*) I led a group of 30 people into the Dragash back-country for a weekend of hiking, camping, and getting back to nature (ie getting very wet on the hike in and out).

The trip was part of a larger effort to develop a nature tourism strategy for the isolated Municipality of Dragash, and to create a series of value chains to help locals benefit from increased tourism.

The project is sponsored by the Finish Government, and is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme.

We have been working on this hiking guide for about a year now and I have written about hiking in Dragash a number of times on Todd's Wanderings as the work

has progressed. Some of the hikes include Brod to Mount Cule, Brod to the Old Macedonian Smuggling Pass and Restelica to Brod.

You will notice a pattern here as the picturesque village of Brod features heavily in my hikes. The beauty of this little village, tucked into a protective valley and wrapped lovingly in a series of crisp rivers, is undeniable. Add in the cultural traditions of the locals, numbering about 1,000, delicious cheese, succulent lamb and a dramatic landscape accessible just a few minutes from town and the tourism potential becomes clear.

The latest hike is the same one that we arranged for the 30 person weekend and the text is the same as you'll find in the soon to be published hiking guide, due out in July 2011.

The Guide contains 12 of my favorite hikes and three mountain biking trails around Dragash Municipality, along with tourism information, easy to follow maps and local knowledge.

If you are looking for a more serviced experience feel free to contact me and I'll can pass along your message to a contact person in the village.

We organised horses to pack up our tents, and for food to be pre-

pared for dinner and breakfast the next morning.

This is just the beginning of mountain tourism in Dragash and we are hoping to lay the foundation for sustainability where locals benefit monetarily, the environment benefits from conservation and tourists have a unique amazing experience.

Brod to Lake Shutman/Sutman

This is one of the best known hikes in the Brod region with a well worn path, and stunning views through the Brod Gorge and into the southern rolling alpine fields where Lake Shutman/Sutman lies. The lake is more of a pond and is shallow with a muddy bottom but beautiful nonetheless.

These small lakes are called mountain eyes due to the resemblance of human eyes when viewed from the mountains above.

This hike can also be combined with two other hikes in the region, Mt. Vraca or the three Peaks hike, which begin and end at Lake Shutman/Sutman.

The lake also provides a nice place to camp for those wanting to

explore more of the southern area of Dragash/Dragas.

Starting/End Point: Arxhena Hotel or Old Road near Brod
Starting elevation: 1384 meters
Highest Elevation: 2120 m

Distance: 8.82 Km
Duration: 6 - 7 Hours round-trip along the same path

Difficulty: Easy. There are very few steep parts to this hike.

Hiking Route Description
You have two options where to start.

You can either start directly from Arxhena Hotel and climb up the steep ski slope behind the hotel which meets the path further on; or you can start from the beginning of the main path along the Old Road closer to Brod which is longer but has a more gentle climb up into the mountains. If starting from the Old Road, follow the main dirt road out of Brod towards Arxhena Hotel with the river on your right hand side.

After the last house between the hotel and the village, just past the rusted skeleton of an old car on its side under a tree, the river passes under the road.

As the river moves to the left side of the road you will see a small concrete water-tap structure on the right and the power lines begin to diverge from the road.



Backcountry: Brod to Lake Shutman

Turn right here and follow the grass road uphill following the wooden electrical poles. This is the start of the Old Road to Macedonia that was never completed. Eventually the grass route will turn to a dirt and rock path. Follow this further into the valley until you are directly above Arxhena Hotel. It is here that the ski slope intersects with the main path.

I love a nice mountain lake. These post glacial lakes are often called mountain eyes as they look like eyes looking up into the sky when seen from the mountain tops above.

Continue following the well-travelled path south into the river gorge. Make sure you stay high up on the path and do not descend to the river and cross it. There is a path on the other side of the river but it is more difficult and does not lead directly to the lake. More than two thirds of the way to the lake you will see a beautiful waterfall where the river rushes out of a narrow rocky gap. The top of the waterfall has a nice area to rest and have a picnic. You can access this area by leaving the path behind after the waterfall turning left, crossing the river at its highest point and then walking back to the waterfall. See the map for further indications, as there is no ded-

icated path to the waterfall from this side of the river.

After passing the waterfall you will come to a point where the path becomes narrow and less clear. This is also where you will see a shepherd's building which doubles as a sharr dog breeding hut. Stay away from the building, as sharr dogs are very protective, even if they are cute when they are young. Stay closer to the mountain on your right and you will eventually make out the path that leads out of this valley and up into the valley with small but beautiful Lake Shutman/Sutman.

Text and photos come courtesy of www.toddswanderings.com, which is crammed full of information about hikes in Dragash, as well as great travel tips for the Balkans and beyond.



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Artists Defend Their Take on Albania's Battered Image

Albanian artists are brushing off complaints that they are not doing their best to counter mockery of their country in the West.



By Ben Andoni

For nearly half-a-century, until the Stalinist regime of Enver Hoxha collapsed in 1991, Albania was one of the most isolated places in the world, often compared to the likes of North Korea.

The few Westerners allowed into Hoxha's self-proclaimed "proletarian paradise," described the regime as a brutal world in which people were constantly under the watch of the feared "Sigurimi" secret police.

Two decades on, the country has opened up to the world, has joined NATO in 2009 and is now tracing a path toward EU membership.

But although Albania no longer jams foreign TV stations and young people no longer end up in jail for listening to rock music, the transition to democracy has done little to improve its battered image.

Foreign media often describe Albania as Europe's wild east, a land where extreme poverty, lawlessness and medieval vendettas overlap, an hour's flight away from Western capitals.

The stark contrasts of a society in which luxury Mercedes dot pot-holed streets has been the theme of many Albanian artists, as they try to make sense of the country's contradictions.

Many reside abroad and, apart from the international media, are the main communicators of Albania's reality to the Western public.

But with the authorities desperate to attract more tourists and investment, their works are often criticized as not doing enough to present a rosier picture of the country.

But the artists themselves resent the idea



of being used as salesmen, pointing out that such suggestions miss the whole point of what their artistic endeavour is all about.

"Although some art is a hymn to beauty, it's more likely to portray what is ugly, fearful, violent, immoral and inhuman," Arian Leka, a poet and publisher based in Tirana, explains.

Although Albania has always received its fair share of bad press, a 2006 travel feature in the Sunday Times by British writer A A Gill really infuriated local intellectuals and the media.

Gill mocked Albanians as "short and ferret-faced, with the unisex stumpy, slightly bowed legs of Shetland ponies."

He also described the Albanian language as "a ready-made code for criminals", adding: "There are four million Albanian citizens... three million of them live at home, the fourth quarter work abroad, and what they do is mostly illegal."

Gill escaped a reprimand from the British Press Complaints Commission, after the Sunday Times made the case for the author's

harsh words, referring to sources from Europol, Save the Children, the EU, the World Bank and the Italian public prosecutors.

But the vitriolic writer - famous for his scabrous verbal assaults on his targets still received death threats by email from Albanians who felt offended and enraged by his words.

Albania was also the butt of British humour in the BBC's Top Gear show, which made references to Albanians are car thieves.

Albanian artists are themselves not above mocking their own homeland, albeit rather more gently and affectionately.

Italian-based filmmaker Edmond Budina's latest feature film, *Balkan Bazaar*, takes a jibe at the region's jumble of nationalities, drawing on the history of the village of Kosine in southern Albania.

There, Greek nationalists in 2006 unearthed what they alleged were the graves of Greek soldiers who had fallen in World War 2.

Greek nationalists have long staked a claim to southernmost Albania, calling the region Northern Epirus.

Balkan Bazaar takes a critical look at both Greek and Albanian nationalism through the eyes of two foreigners, a scheming journalist and his superstitious driver, and the script has drawn heat both from Albania and Greece.

Budina does not feel inclined to apologise. "I think we hang on to an old mentality about the image of the country," he says. "Many think that it's enough to draw a nice postcard and send it, and that will give Albania the place that it deserves," he adds.

The "old mentality" that Budina describes was rooted in the xenophobic culture of Hoxha's half-century regime.

Although the Communist authorities keenly sponsored the arts, the results had to conform to the strict rules of Social Realism, while at the same time singing the praises of the party and of Hoxha's own



provincial brand of nationalism.

Leka says that although art is no longer seen as a propaganda tool for a ruling elite or ideology, the public expectation remains that writers and painters should build up their country's image.

"It's not the role of art or literature in general to create images about specific places," he says. "Literature speaks to the world... and to all of humanity," he added.

Filmmaker Budina agrees. In the art world, artists make use of the images that a country projects - not the other way around.

"Albania is a country with its good and bad sides, its beautiful and ugly images - the important thing is how you use them," Budina maintains.

"Inspiration can be found even in what is ugly and evil, and by narrating this we can grow richer and better [human beings]," he concludes.

This article is funded under the BICCED project, supported by the Swiss Cultural Programme

PJ Harvey Confirms Dokufest Appearance



By Lawrence Marzouk

Singer-songwriter PJ Harvey and Irish photographer Seamus Murphy will be presenting their 12 short films at this year's Dokufest.

Organisers of the Prizren festival, which is fast gaining a worldwide reputation, said they were thrilled by the news.

Harvey and Murphy will travel to Kosovo for a special screening of the films at DokuFest and will hold a Q&A session about their collaboration.

Award-winning photographer Seamus Murphy travelled

5,000 miles around England to create 12 films inspired by and developed from themes in Harvey's new album, the critically acclaimed *Let England Shake*, which was released in February this year, entering the UK charts in the top 10.

Each film is a combination of still and moving imagery, made in the manner of classic photographic reportage recording real and spontaneous situations to document England and the English.

Murphy, an award winning photographer, has spent over two decades uniquely documenting conflict through his lens.

His work has brought him to Rwanda, Eritrea, Kosovo, Iran and Iraq.



Albanian Artists Revive Lost Balkan Connections

Writers and directors are rebuilding links between Albania and its estranged neighbours, which virtually snapped during decades of isolation under Enver Hoxha.



By Marjola Rukaj

After several decades of total isolation from their neighbours under Enver Hoxha's xenophobic regime, Albanians are rediscovering the Balkans with a range of new books and movies exploring Balkan-related topics and themes.

Albanian writer Anilda Ibrahim, who writes in Italian and lives in Rome, dedicated her last book in 2010, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo*, to the theme of a love story between a Kosovo Albanian girl from Prishtina and a young man from Belgrade, before and after the conflict in Kosovo in 1999.

A few years earlier, in 2007, Ornela Vorpsi, an Albanian writer and photographer also writing in Italian, in *La mano che non morde*, described her relationship with a Serb from Belgrade living in Paris, and her strong friendship with a Bosnian artist from Sarajevo.

Albanian video-artist Adrian Paci meanwhile has produced a video chronicling the war in Kosovo and combining it with videos from a Yugoslav porn show that many Albanians over the border used to watch covertly in the 1980s, when watching foreign televisions was prohibited by the Hoxha regime.

Albanian film directors and producers have launched a range of films dealing with the Balkans in the past few years.

Gjergj Xhuvani's 2009 *East-West-East*, for example, depicted the adventures of a couple (a group, they were 5-6) of Albanians cycling through Yugoslavia in 1989, just before the country exploded.

Also in 2009, Genc Permeti collaborated with Goran Paskaljevic on the first ever Serbian-Albanian co-production, *Honeymoons*, while Albanian director Edmond Budina's 2011 *Balkan Bazaar* reflects on a political incident between Greece and Albania.

These artists say Albania is slowly rediscovering its sympathies and commonalities with the rest of the region.

Permeti, chief of the Albanian production house Ska-Ndal, says the first Serbian-Albanian co-production was consciously intended "to show that we are able to give the hand to each-other and to



collaborate".

"We have a very strong spiritual relationship to other peoples from the Balkans. If we don't take into consideration the political manipulations that we have absorbed, it is very evident that we are very similar," director Xhuvani says.

Writer Anilda Ibrahim echoed that point when presenting her book, published by Italian publishing house Einaudi, on a Serbian-Albanian love story.

"I wanted to tell a story in which Serbs are not being denigrated as they are usually, because this chain of violence between Serbs and Albanians has to finish," she said.

Edmond Budina agrees. "In *Balkan Bazaar*, beside other topics, I wanted to show that in the Balkans we are very similar, we think the same way," he told *Balkan Insight*.

"We are ethnically mixed too. Part of my family now lives in Macedonia, speaks Macedonian and they perceive themselves as Macedonians," he added. "Following the logic of nationalism and isolation, I should consider them my enemies. But it does not make sense."

But Armanda Kodra, an anthropologist in Tirana, warns that breaking down the old sense of separateness felt by many Albanians will not be easy.

"Albanian culture still reflects the isolation that was typical under the period of National Communism," he (she) said.

"Albanians see themselves as unique, and as descendants of the Ancient Illyrians, without similarity to their Slavic or Greek neighbours who they also consider enemies."

Dhimiter Doko, a scholar of demography specializing (professor of demography at the University of Tirana) in ethnic minorities in Albania, makes the same point.

"Even 20 years after the fall of the Communism, we still perceive our neighbours largely through political stereotypes," he said. "The Albanian media strictly follows this kind of stereotyping while reporting on the Balkans," he added.

Significantly, most of the artists and authors who have been most instrumental in breaking down negative stereotypes about Albania's neighbours have been living for many years outside the country in Western Europe.

Edmond Budina, director of *Balkan Bazaar*, maintains that he didn't have strong prejudices about Albania's neighbours even before he left the country. "But since I've been living for 20 years in Italy as a migrant, dealing with people from all the world, you notice how much feeling there is among us and other people from the Balkans," he said.

"Beside that, living in multi-ethnic societies makes you go further, towards deconstructing stereotypes," he added.

One Italian critic of literature, who wants to remain anonymous, said the process of opening up needed to be seen in its true context.

Recalling the new trend for Albanian literature in prestigious Italian publishing houses, he said: "The opening up of some Albanian authors to the Balkans is a kind of Balkan version of the multi-ethnic tolerance that a certain type of left intellectuals profess in Western countries."

"In the last twenty years we dealt with our problems and our Albanian traumas, and now that we have achieved a certain level of stability, we are dealing with a wider space we belong to, the Balkans," is how writer Elvira Dones sees it.

Breaking taboos and stereotypes about ones neighbours has certain economic advantages, others note.

"There are many foundations and fundraising possibilities in connection to projects based on international collaboration among Balkan countries," recalls Sofia Kalo, an Albanian scholar at Massachusetts University.

Filmmakers especially agree that producing a film today is virtually impossible without having an international co-production agreement, which in Albania's



case means a deal with some other countries from the Balkans, as well as other countries from Western Europe.

Meanwhile, the process of opening up to the Balkans is not without its critics.

Cultural journalists like Koloreto Cukali and Elsa Demo have slated Albanian cinema for crudely imitating the way that the well known Serbian director Emir Kusturica directs his films.

But Albanian director Artan Minarolli shrugs this off. "It is normal that our films are similar to those of Kusturica, since we come from the same cultural space in the Balkans," he says.

This article is funded under the BICCED project, supported by the Swiss Cultural Programme.

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Where to pick up Prishtina Insight?

Prishtina Insight has teamed up with these six 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.

Jinglebells

If your soul is affected by the grey season then pay a visit to Jinglebells, where you will find all the colours that you've been missing.

Jinglebells is a perfect one-stop-shop for internationals offering a selection of books in various languages and the quickest supply of international newspapers in town. It also offers souvenirs and gifts, such as local handicrafts.



*Jinglebells.
Bookstore and
more.
Ernest Koliqi
12, opposite
EULEX HQ
+386(0)49 741 170*

Cavallero Mexican Restaurant

You can almost transport yourself to the Mexican coast, with soaring palm trees and an immaculate five star resort, while dining at Cavallero Mexican Cantina. Mouth-watering appetizers and savoury main dishes are nicely washed down with countless cocktail options and even imported Mexican beer. Skopje-based 'Los Ritmos' entertain diners every Friday and Saturday with their latin beats. For more information, visit their facebook page, or contact them.



*Cavallero,
Located next to the ex-
UNMIK building
Prishtina
+386 49 619 375
Facebook page*

A taste of Napoli in Prishtina.

After ten years of making pizza in Napoli, and only with love to blame, Fatmir the chef returned to Prishtina. His pizzas, made in a woodburn stove, are definitely genuine napolitanas. For those who consider pizza to be boring, Fatmir has several pastas on offer, also 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 Quint's 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 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 garden. 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.hote-
lafa.com*

Cantina am-pm Restaurant

Cantina AM-PM, formerly known as Mexican Cantina, recently went through a transfer to new management, and although hardly noticeable from a distance, the new owners have transformed the venue into a more grown-up affair with good, cheap food. Cantina offers Mexican dishes at reasonable prices, starting from less than 5 euro. Although the majority of the food is Mexican-influenced, Cesar salad and pizza have been included too. Mexican favourites served up at Cantina include tortilla, thicker pan-fried tortilla, nacho chips and burrito. Cantina's also offers a very pleasant area for al fresco dining.



*Cantina AM-PM
Rr Qamil Hoxha
Prishtina
+377 49 710 710*

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 Victory

But Victory is more than a place to meet and do business. Its doors are always open for guests to enjoy the tranquility of our guest rooms and lobbies, and the finest cuisine in the region. The only hotel in the region where real plants, original art and fine solid furniture decorate the space and turn it into a homelike environment. Hotel Victory is established to offer travelers the most complete, comfortable accommodation available in Kosovo and the region. Our professional staff will offer guests the highest standard of service and support, and we will use our resources to greater lengths to make your stay as complete as possible.



*Hotel Victory
Mother Teresa
Prishtina, Kosovo
Tel: +381 38 543 277
+381 38 543 267
Email:
info@hotel-vict-
ory.com
http://www.hotel-
victory.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*

Friends Bar

Friends Bar is owned by a Swiss-Albanian couple. The modern interior and the calm terrace behind the bar will make your stay comfortable. They offer a wide range of beers, including Dark Lasko and Murphy's Irish Red, which can rarely be found in Kosovo. You can also try eight different tastes and colours of vodka. Starting from May 14 there will be barbecues every Saturday from 5pm to 9pm, and brunch every Sunday from 9am to 1pm. BBQ and brunch will be offered with a wide choice of local and international food.



*17, Rr:Fehmi
Agani
045244 498
Facebook
Page: Friends
Bar - Prishtine*

Odyssea Bistro

Odyssea Bistro Bar is a beautiful bistro located in the heart of Prishtina, offering a combination of a quality menu with inspiring dishes and a modern bar with a large variety of drinks and exotic cocktails.

Odyssea Bistro Bar's unique design is a mixture of classic French influence and a modern touch.

Busy during lunch breaks, romantic for dinners and classy for evening drinks, Bistro is a great place to visit at any time of the day.

Sample Bistro's brunch on Sundays, or enjoy live music on Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays

*Bistro,
Sejdi Kryeziu, Pejton, Prishtina
045402095 and 049333959*



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*



OLIVE TAPAS BAR

After many years of working at tapas bars in England and Germany as well as running the first in Prishtina, you can say that management knows its trade well.

Among the tapas and main courses offered are: Rocket salad with mixed cheeses; Spanish tortilla, omelet with vegetables & potatoes; and deep fried calamari.

*Open Monday to Saturday
7 am until 12 pm*

*Olive Tapas Bar
St.Fehmi Agani 48/1
Tel. +381 38 321 132
Cell +377 44 620 414
olivetapasbar@gmail.com*





Kosovo Muslims Step Up Mosque Protests

Defying police warnings not to block roads, a Muslim group in Prishtina says it will hold a new street protest on Friday, demanding a new city-centre mosque.



By Petrit Collaku

A Kosovo Muslim group called "Bashkohu" said it would hold a new street protest in Prishtina during Friday prayers at noon defying police warnings not to block roads.

The head of "Bashkohu", Fuad Ramiqi, said the protest would take place at the same location as during the last two Friday protests.

"I don't need police permission. I have informed them that the protest will be held tomorrow," Ramiqi said.

But interior minister Bajram Rexhepi insists the main street must not be blocked; he was not against protests but against road blockades, he said. "I think the answer



is very clear. They cannot block the roads," Rexhepi told journalists.

Ramiqi denied that the protests had any connection with the newly inaugurated Catholic cathedral in Prishtina, to which some Muslims object.

They say that Catholics, though a small minority in Kosovo, encounter fewer obstacles than majority Muslims when it comes to obtaining permits for places of worship.

"We are not against the cathedral but Muslim believers need to have a new mosque in the centre of Prishtina," Ramiqi told Prishtina Insight.

He said the Muslim community had requested a new mosque in Prishtina's downtown five years ago.

He also said that 22 mosques were not sufficient to accommodate the city's growing number of believers. The protest enjoys the support of Kosovo's Islamic Community.

Last Friday, some 300 people prayed outside the Carshi Mosque during a protest.

In an attempt to unblock the road, police scuffled with one person and took him away for questioning.

Prishtina municipality, meanwhile, says it has accepted the proposal from Kosovo's Islamic Community for a new mosque in principle and was reviewing the plan.

"All such proposals must go through the municipal assembly and the location is then decided following mutual agreement between the municipality and Islamic Community," Muhamet Gashi, municipal spokesperson, told Prishtina Insight.

Little Cafes Facing Closure

Venues in Prishtina's popular drinking quarter – the little cafe neighbourhood – are struggling through another summer of roadworks



By Shengjyl Osmani

Customers are shunning the Kafet e Volga area of Prishtina, known for its alfresco coffee drinking, for a second summer as the municipality continues with roadworks along this once popular stretch.

Businesses along Fehmi Agani Street told Prishtina Insight that they may have to shut down because of the drop in visitors.

The municipality started replacing the waterworks in spring last year and have still not replaced the pavement to date.

"People of course don't want to drink coffee and have the never ending noise of the ongoing works," said Festim Fanaj, owner of Etno Bar.

He added that if works don't stop end by the start of next month, he might go out of business, as the monthly taxes paid to the municipality and other monthly expenses cannot be covered by the current situation.



Muhamet Gashi, spokesperson for the municipality, told Prishtina Insight that the works will be completed by the end of the July.

"The water pipelines in Fehmi Agani Street and in UCK Street are in the final stages," he said. "The project needed coordination so that both streets are finished at same time and the pavements and all the road works were completed at same time," added Gashi.

But, owners of small coffee bars in Kafet e vogla area do not believe that the works will be completed this summer.

Fisnik Lajqi, owner of Track Cafe, said the works had drastically affected his business, particularly as this is the second summer, usually the most lucrative time of year.

"It is not fair to us to have these works ongoing for two years," he said. "It is very rare that a street is dug up for three months, but this water pipeline took more than a year to be replaced, and then we had to wait another year to for the UCK street to be completed so our pavements can be fixed too."

Soho Street Bar, Gallery cafe, Kafja e vogel, and five other small cafe bars told Prishtina Insight that since the works have started, their businesses have suffered drastic financial losses.

Spokesman Gashi said that the works could not have been completed any faster.

Shop Review

On Off Accessories Shop



By Shengjyl Osmani

Looking for a smart accessory for that outfit or perhaps a great gift for your lady friend? On Off Accessories Shop offer something different to customers in Prishtina: a decent selection of handmade, locally produced jewellery, such as Prizren filigree, and international designer goods.

The recently opened outlet in

Youth and Sports Centre in Prishtina is the third of its kind in the capital and stocks leather bags and purses, belts, scarves, watches, jewellery and handmade filigrees.

In a bid to promote handmade handicrafts from Prizren, On Off Accessories also takes order for filigree jewellery. Filigree cufflinks, which cannot be found in any other place in the town, are also available.

Beside the filigree, you can find silver, stainless steel, and pearl items.

Their silver specialty are the

name necklaces, which will cost you only 45 euro, no matter how long the name is.

The filigree jewellery costs from 20 euro up to 60 euro for a set of earrings and necklaces. The watches are good looking with low prices, from 25 to 30 euro.

While the bags, which are handmade leather, designed in Italy, cost from 35 euro to 120 euro.

*On Off Accessories
Youth and Sports Centre
Prishtina
044 305 256*

Open hours 10 am - 8 pm,



Inside Prishtina

Bar Review:

Epic Sangria is King at Olive

New tapas bar is perfect place to waste afternoon



By Nate Tabak

Bar Review, LOGIN

Recently opened in Peyton area, Login Bar & Restaurant is offers a pleasant spot to grab some Prishtina classics.

On the menu you'll find the usual selection of omelettes, salads, sandwiches, pastas, pizzas and grill fish and meet.

LOGIN isn't going to blow you away with its originality, but it is a decent spot to grab some keenly priced lunch.

For orders call at 044 806 496 or visit them in Peyton, Perandori Justinia street (next to Benetton shop)

*Login
Bar & Restaurant
Perandori Justinia
street
Peyton area*



Restaurant Review:

Click Food: Silly name, Serious Fried Chicken



By Gravlax

Fried chicken. Just seeing the words makes my mouth water. It's much more than poultry parts dipped in batter and cooked in hot oil. When you bite into that crunchy coating and sink your teeth into juicy, tender meat, it can be a religious experience.

Prishtina has a temple of fried-chicken devotion. Its name is Click Food. The motto, "It's fingerclicking good," evokes Kentucky Fried Chicken. But do forgive such asinine marketing because Click's chicken puts to shame anything that ever came out of the Colonel's fryers.

The centrally located Click Food, on Fehmi Agani Street, resulted from a dream to open a McDonald's franchise. Spurned by the Golden Arches, the owners have in turn accomplished something far more special. They created a fast food eatery that is sort of a tribute to McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken and apparently uses much of the same equipment as the American juggernauts.

Burgers and fried chicken form Click's foundation, alongside a few sandwiches, salads and pizzas. Think of it as the greatest hits from the world of fast food, with the addition of Peja beer on draught. Ordering happens at the counter, but the food comes to you in a twist of elegance that suits the classy dining room and delightful patio.

Chicken sometimes requires a bit of a wait, perhaps ten minutes or so. That may seem like an eternity at a quick service restaurant, but it's well worth it. The fried chicken is nearly pitch perfect. Anything dipped in battered and then deep-fried will be good on some primal levels. But Click pays the bird its due. Available in several seasonings and in orders of two or three pieces, which usually includes at least one drum stick, the chicken arrives hot in a yin-and-



yang of the spicy, fried indulgence on the outside and the delicate moist chicken on the inside. The kitchen is conservative with its spicing and salting so you can actually taste what you're eating: exceptional chicken. The presentation is simple. The chicken is served on a bed of French fries and few random vegetables. Once, my order came with a mysterious kaymak-like sauce. It was a welcomed Balkanification of dish most at home in the American South.

If for some mysterious reason the chicken doesn't entice, Click makes a decent burger. Served on a fluffy sesame-seed bun, they come in several varieties, including an especially delicious pershute and mushroom one. But they suffer a condition nearly ubiquitous among Kosovo burgers: pljeskavica syndrome. The beef patties, while tasty and seasoned with love, are not made of the ground meat required for a proper burger. They amount to masses of flattened cevapi, which is just a different

kind of pleasure.

The burgers go best with fries, which you can get with a soda in combination meals for less than 3 euro. Click cooks the fries golden brown to just the precise level of external crispiness. They also happen to taste like potatoes. The kitchen clearly understands the art of deep-frying.

While Click's owners might be lamenting the fact that McDonald's didn't want any Kosovo franchises. They have struck good with fast-food fusion that outshines their corporate inspirations, and in the process, given Prishtina fried chicken worthy of song.



*Click Food
Street 'Fehmi Agani' No. 5
Open daily, 8 a.m. - midnight
049 580 508*

Prishtina through the Eyes of:

Teresa Fischer

Intern at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung



What surprised you most about Prishtina?

That it is such a colourful, lively and charming city, irrespective of some tiny flaws.

What's your favourite hangout?

It's more a "Top Three" than one favourite hangout: Tingell Tangell, Dit e Nat and Crème de la Crème.

What is the best thing about Prishtina?

In Prishtina, you are never alone. It can be a bit annoying from time to time, especially when you want to sleep and you have the loudest Karaoke party you've ever heard next door, but everyone is so friendly and open that I never felt lonely in this city.

What is the most annoying thing about Prishtina?

Probably the condition of sidewalks and streets - Chapeau to all these brave girls you see every day and who manage to walk there in killer high heels without breaking their legs.

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

I would hire a lot of traffic policemen to stop cars from chasing after pedestrians.

How many macchiatos do you drink a day?

Maybe one or two, but if it's allowed to count Turkish coffee as well, the number increases considerably.

What's your favourite Albanian word and why?

It is simply "jo" Because in the Bavarian dialect I speak, it means "yes" and already led to many confusing situations here in Prishtina.

What landmark do you use to tell taxi drivers where you live?

Filikaqa Sports Bar or Vetevendosje

Skopje Warrior Fails to Make Greek Headlines

Debt-ravaged Greeks appear content to let Europe chastise Skopje over its new statue of an 'ancient warrior'.



By George Mesthos

If you logged on to a Greek news site last week, you wouldn't have found much coverage of the "Ancient Warrior", that is, the statue of Alexander the Great, erected a few days ago in Skopje.

In years past, such "historical usurpations" would have made headline news. But Greeks are far more pre-occupied with the debt crisis that has threatened their way of life and made bright futures more of a wish than a goal.

The recommendation of both Athens and Brussels was that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, FYROM, ought to be more pre-occupied with its destiny, too. Owing to the "name issue", that particular road passes through Greece.

Since FYROM declared independence in 1991, Greece has had a national apoplexy over use of the name "Macedonia", which is also the name of a northern province of Greece - and claims to the heritage of Alexander the Great as a Hellenic figure.

Greek political parties have won and fallen from power over the "name" issue and at key moments, such as at the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008, touching that nationalist nerve has summoned an otherwise non-existent sense of political unity among Greeks.

But at this moment, even Alexander cannot distract Greeks from double-digit unemployment, from a 23 per cent sales tax and from the constant uneasiness of living in a near-bankrupt state, propped up by despised bailout packages from the International Monetary Fund, IMF, the European Union and European Central Bank.

The "name" issue has become a sort of Guantanamo Bay for Greece's government. It would like to see this internationally embarrassing issue closed as soon as possible. But any move in that direction would result in cries of national, ethnic and historical treason.

Foreign guests boast about how Greek ministers themselves admit that the name issue is "stupid" and taints Greece's otherwise progressive vision in the Balkans - a crucial agenda for the country's own, unfinished European integration.

The scar tissue from this issue mars the consciousness of the Greek public. In 1999, the American historian, Eugene Borza, wrote of how nearly a decade after FYROM's independence, Greeks firmly believed claims that not only was the Star of Vergina (a symbol of Ancient Macedon, unearthed in 1977) originally on their neighbour's flag, but that Skopje airport had been renamed after Alexander the Great and that Alexander stood, already erected, in the city's central square.

These claims back then were ludicrous. But in the last decade they became true, as Nikola Gruevski's VMRO-DPNE party pursued a policy of "antiquity-isation" that has won elections while stalling FYROM's European Integration.

So Greek politicians are in a box. They desire leadership in the region, but it is unacceptable domestically to condone a neighbour's "usurpation" of Greek history.

Greece's unspoken strategy has been to have ... an unspoken strategy.

The Greek foreign ministry has done whatever it can to avoid publicly addressing the "name", focusing more on functional aspects of partnership and development, like environmental collaboration on Lake Prespa.

The official stance on solving the "name" issue is to have a geographical qualifier added to the word Macedonia, such as "North", or "Vardar", rather than an ethnic or historical marker such as "Slav" or "New".

That Athens offered such a compromise is itself a sign of progress. Greece long ago admitted what was unthinkable in the early 1990s - that geographical Macedonia is split between Greece, FYROM and Bulgaria, with the majority of the territory in Greece.

Both of Greece's major parties have adopted this position but a settlement to the issue would take a healthy dose of political courage from the Socialist administration of George Papandreu. The opposition centre-right New Democracy party is edging the Socialists in the polls under the leadership of Antonis Samaras, and Samaras made his reputation on the "name" issue in the 1990s.

Any settlement, no matter the terms, would likely get the same negative spin treatment that the various austerity packages have received.

Nonetheless, Greece's current strategy has turned the tables, a rare positive foreign policy development for Athens.

For years Greece was globally lampooned for denying its neighbour's name - whatever the arguments - considering FYROM's rousing underdog story and simmering ethnic tensions. The Western media gave up on the FYROM acronym even before Washington and more than 100 other governments did so officially. To almost every non-Greek it simply does not make sense to tell a people they cannot be called what they want to be called. It is also exceedingly difficult either to say or type the words Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia over and over. The Greek acronym PGDM (ΠΓΔΜ) is entirely unpronounceable.

But if Greece is losing the public relations battle over the name Macedonia, she is winning the war for history. If telling a country what it can be called is absurd, so is a country laying claim to its neighbour's most beloved historical figure - whatever the arguments and rationalizations. In classrooms from Berlin to San

Francisco to Sydney, Western school children are taught that Alexander the Great spread Greek culture throughout the Near East, influencing the region for centuries, if not millennia.

Such monuments in another country seem quite bizarre, starting with the re-naming of Skopje's airport in early 2007 after Alexander the Great.

"At first, friends of [FYROM] thought this must be some sort of one-off joke designed to gain a rise out of the Greeks, who believe that the Macedonians are trying to expropriate symbols Hellenism," Tim Judah wrote in the Economist on November 22, 2010. "It was not."

Skopje has realised the West's dismay to some extent, thus the messy designation of the 23-metre statue as an "ancient warrior". It was too little, too late. Washington and Brussels have criticized Skopje all this year for hiding behind the name issue instead of addressing fundamental weaknesses in its state institutions, quality of democracy and ethnic relations.

European Union Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule sounded exasperated in his much-circulated quote from last Monday, following the statue's unveiling, which has been dubbed a "Yellow Card".

"Seriously," Fule said. "If you have a neighbour, and I'm not talking about two states now, and there is an issue between the two of you, whatever the nature of that issue is, and you are trying sincerely to solve it, I guess you would avoid doing anything that your neighbour might call a provocation. This is simple logic."

http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_ws1_1_21/06/2011_395365

This 'yellow card' was accompanied by a warning that FYROM could lose its recommendation for a state date for EU membership negotiations. Only anemic advances have been made since FYROM received candidate status in 2005. Since then, Romania and Bulgaria have become part of the bloc, and Croatia will soon join them.

Both the European Union and NATO have tried to get across to Skopje's leaders that the country will make no further progress on the Euro-Atlantic path merely to stave off conflict internally or within the region. To become a full, productive member of the club there have to be good neighbourly relations - no matter how absurd the issue.

Whether out of sympathy or cunning, Athens' restrained response that Skopje should build bridges rather than statues set a tone that there is a possibility to be productive. Both sides will have to be, since each has bigger things to worry about than a 23-metre statue.

George Mesthos is an independent journalist and analyst of Balkan politics.

As a Greek-American, and a regular reporter/researcher in Athens, the author chooses to use the 1995 Interim Accord designation, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia [FYROM].

Outside In Kosovo's census: Are we shrinking?



By Kreshnik Hoxha

"Blimey, where has everyone gone?" This was my initial reaction when faced with the fact that Kosovo has 1, 773, 872 citizens according to the Statistical Office of Kosovo (SOK). This figure is the end result of the census held last April in 34 municipalities of Kosovo, excluding the lawless Northern part of the country and the Diaspora.

Though the data should be taken with a pinch of salt, it is evident that even with the error emanating from the registration methodology, which has not been stated in the SOK website, the results ought to be in this region. A surprise for everyone, but what does it mean for Kosovo in the whole and what could its implications be?

Ever since the end of the war we had been boasting that Prishtina has half a million citizens, in this way trying to paint a rather cosmopolitan and modern picture in the eyes of the foreign visitors.

It turns out we do not even reach 200, 000 in Prishtina as the census concludes that Prishtina has 198, 214 citizens including its villages. It also transpires that the Serbs, who left the city in 1999, have been replaced by Albanians in an equal proportion and there has been no substantial net growth in the overall count of the city.

Although Prishtina has a special status over all other municipalities due to being the capital of Kosovo, this figure will inevitably open discussions about the distribution of funds to Prishtina in comparison to other municipalities. This would especially be the case with Prizren, which is only 20, 102 citizens behind Prishtina and would therefore ask for similar treatment allocation of funds.

On a bigger picture, Kosovo could undergo some changes in its political arrangement and alterations in the decision-making power of minority groups as more data emerge in the coming days.

There has been a growing pressure over the last years to introduce Turkish as an official language in Prishtina from the Turkish community in the capital, who at times feel slightly left behind. However, fighting their corner might prove challenging for Turks following recent reports in the media that people had been peer-pressured to register themselves as Turks, despite their original Albanian nationality. Nevertheless, their only hope for tangible results to address their requests would be their headcount in the census.

Secondly, Montenegro has been very keen on pushing forward the idea of recognition of Montenegrins as a minority group in Kosovo. The publication of results based on nationalities living in Kosovo could be a major step up in materialising Montenegro's efforts. This in turn would lead to changes in the parliament seats whereby Montenegrins would be allocated guaranteed representation in parliament.

Conspiracy lovers will be yelling that the census was manipulated for some unknown political reason and that the figure really is 2 million.

Fuelled by irony about the results, a reader of one of the online portals quipped the following: "If the Serbian Academy of Sciences [notorious for its institutionalised anti-Albanian agenda] organised the census, we [Albanians] would have been larger in numbers!"

With all that in mind, I can already imagine the tangle of inter-ethnic and inter-religious debates that will accompany Kosovo during the muggy summer as various sides try to make sense of the figures.

opinions

Less Drama From Albania's Socialist Leader

Edi Rama's strategy of confrontation and gridlock ill-serves his party and his country. Time for a new approach.



By David L. Phillips

There is a time for contestation and a time for reconciliation. After local elections on May 8, Albania is at a fork in the road.

Instead of trying to overturn Edi Rama's razor-thin defeat in the race for mayor of Tirana, the Socialist Party should assume its role as loyal opposition and cooperate on a consensus plan advancing Albania's candidacy to join the European Union.

No more drama. It's time for governance.

Both parties had big stakes in Tirana's mayoral election. As mayor of Tirana, a stronghold of the Socialist Party, Rama doled out lucrative construction contracts to cronies who provided kickbacks and political support.

Lulzim Basha, the Democratic Party candidate, ran a strong campaign, harnessing the power of social media. The winning party is well placed for national elections in 2013.

The government of Albania worked with experts from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission to draft the election law, which was endorsed by the Socialist Party. Both international and local election observers were present at polling stations with agreed procedures to verify the validity of each ballot.

In voting for a slate of different local government positions, voters were instructed to deposit their ballots for different offices in designated boxes. Some voters, especially young first-time voters, mistakenly deposited their ballots in the wrong boxes.

Even Albania's president was caught on film misplacing his ballot.

Albania's electoral law had an unforeseen flaw. There was no provision for ballots that were deposited in the wrong box.

Without prejudice to the outcome, the Central Elections Commission determined that failure to count votes put in the wrong box would disenfranchise voters and undermine the will of the people. It ordered a recount in some districts.

Though Rama led by 10 votes after the initial tally, a partial recount put Basha ahead by 78 votes. The Socialists launched a legal appeal to overturn the decision to count some misplaced ballots.

The court ruled in favour of the Socialist Party, determining that fairness would be best served by counting all misplaced ballots, not only those in specific districts. Contested ballots in 368 boxes were added to the final tally and Basha was finally declared the winner by 93 votes on June 25.

Despite Basha's victory, the overall results show that Albania remains deeply divided. In addition to a virtual draw in Tirana, the Democratic Party won the popular vote nationwide while the Socialists won most municipalities. Rama has a history of obstructionism and of placing his personal interest over



the national interest.

After parliamentary elections in 2009, the Socialists were outmaneuvered by the Democratic Party that formed a coalition to lead the government. Socialist deputies refused to take their seats in parliament.

Rama's strategy was to create gridlock, delegitimize the government and demand early elections.

The strategy failed. Having become a NATO member in 2008, Albanians wanted additional reforms so as to gain visa liberalization from the EU. In a historic decision, the EU decided to grant Albanian passport holders visa-free travel in October 2010.

At a time when Europe is deeply concerned about immigration, the decision was a measure of Albania's progress since the desperate exodus of many Albanians to Italy following the 1997 financial collapse.

Becoming a candidate for EU membership is Albania's next milestone. The EU Council of Ministers recently enhanced Albania's European perspective by identifying 12 areas requiring reforms in order to become a candidate country.

The European integration agenda is a long road. Membership requires compliance with 60,000 pages of rules and regulations. By spelling out a reform agenda, the EU has offered Albania a significant opportunity incentivizing reforms aimed at harmonizing legislation with the EU's *acquis communautaire*.

Rama and the Socialists need to stop complaining and focus on working inclusively to realize the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Albania's reputation has suffered enough.

Rising above the fray, Prime Minister Sali Berisha should issue an appeal for national reconciliation and calling for a dialogue on the development of a consensus action plan advancing Albania's EU candidacy. Albanians must focus on the greater good setting national interests ahead of personal gain.

Rama and the Socialists will be tempted to act as spoilers. Rama has threatened street protests to overturn the election result in Tirana. This is a risky and

dangerous course, both for the Socialist Party – and for Albania.

On January 21, 2011, Rama's supporters rallied to protest corruption allega-

tions against a coalition member of the government. Four protesters were killed when the crowd stormed the prime minister's office. Albanians are tired of confrontation.

This time around, Rama's appeal could fall on deaf ears. If nobody showed up to protest, it would rub salt into the wounds of his electoral defeat.

There is also a growing malaise among young members of the Socialist Party who are dissatisfied with Rama's leadership. Provoking a confrontation is a tactic that could backfire against Rama, sparking an internal revolt within the Socialist Party and his removal from the chairmanship.

European countries are tired of Albania's polarized politics. At this critical crossroads, Albanians need to overcome internal divisions and focus on their shared vision of a European future.

David L. Phillips is Director of the Program on Peace-Building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights and a Fellow of the Future of Diplomacy Project at Harvard University.

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Community News

US and AUK Students restore Jewish Cemetery in Prishtina



By Shengjyl Osmani

Eleven students from Dartmouth College and ten students from the American University in Kosovo, AUK, have restored the rundown Jewish Cemetery in Prishtina.

Dartmouth College in the US, for the tenth year, took a group of students of different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds to Eastern Europe to carry out a restoration project.

Alongside peers from AUK, the students set about improving the cemetery for the once vibrant Jewish community in Kosovo.

Debris was cleared and the overgrown grass cut back at this neglected Jewish cemetery, a lone remaining sign of a dwindling community in this majority Muslim country.

After the 1999 war, these



The now tidy cemetery

graves have been abandoned and forgotten, although a Czech scheme launched in 2008 also attempted to restore the site to its former beauty.

The Czech Embassy in Kosovo and the Kosovo Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports spent 13,000 euro for the improvements, which were unveiled in October 26, 2009, at which the Czech Ambassador, Janina Hrebickova, as well as then Minister of Culture, Valton

Beqiri, spoke on the importance of preserving and protecting a site that bears testimony to a civilization that lived in Kosovo for so long.

However, the site soon fell back into disrepair.

Max Yoeli, a Dartmouth student, visiting Kosovo for the first time, said that the experience in Kosovo had been different than the previous ones in Eastern Europe.

"For the first time we are working with local peers who really helped us a lot to find out more about the genocide history of this newly born country," claimed Max.

Lauren Pace, one of the team leaders from Dartmouth students, agreed with Max's statement and added that the experience in Kosovo is one that they will remember for good.

"As my second year on Project Preservation, I am proud to have been one of the leaders of this year's trip. The work we did was enhanced so much by the friendships that we made with our peers at

AUK. I am so proud of what we have done in Prishtina," added Lauren.

Susan Matthew, the other leader of the Dartmouth group, claimed that they are proud of the new look of the cemetery, and hope these graves remain as such for a long time.

"We worked under the sun, from the morning 'til the afternoon, and our hard work goes to all these buried people so that they are remembered as once having been inhabitants of this city," added Susan.

Dradan Hajrizi, the team leader of AUK students, said that "it is very important for Kosovo people to still keep the memory of Jews who lived in Kosovo".

"As my grandfather told me once about the dark history of Jews during the Nazi period, through this project finally I got the opportunity to continue the family tradition, to help Jewish people again, this time through the cemetery. I hope Kosovo will continue to show how helpful and tolerant we are as a nation."

Anesa Colakovic, AUK student from Mitrovica, added that this experience had helped her understand that during the history many people had suffered in the Balkan and across Europe.

"The Project Preservation made me think further about the people who suffered during WWII and their dark ending, a similar picture to what we had once gone through," concluded Anesa.

Ecosovo

When secondhand is not second best



By Elizabeth Gowing

There's an end-of-term feeling about. Not only are Kosovo's schools on holiday, and summer plans hatching, but donor-funded projects are wrapping up before new initiatives start in September and it's a time when members of the international community are shipping out.

This year I'm aware of these cycles a little bit more because the work I'm involved in is benefiting from them. Word has spread that The Ideas Partnership is distributing clothing to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families in need in Fushe Kosove, and that we're in need of resources and equipment for the classes we're running for kids unable to register in school.

So a big thank you to all those who have hefted bin bags of unwanted clothing down their stairs to our waiting car, have driven bulky items out to the mahalla in Fushe Kosove, have passed on stationery and equipment from offices closing down or wardrobes slimming down. And if anyone else has appropriate items needing rehoming do get in touch.

Of course we are not the only possible home for such surplus - I'm not just posting a 'wanted' advert here. Everyone will have their preferred recipient, whether it is through a charitable organization, or a spontaneous offloading onto someone seen begging on the street, or the case of a family known privately to be facing difficulty. The moral and environmental imperative is to pass on our unwanted clothes or household or office items responsibly.

Despite the existence of initiatives like ours at The Ideas Partnership or the Red Cross' much bigger operation, there are really very few formalised ways for people in Kosovo to redistribute unwanted possessions. No Freecycle here, no charity shops. Informal systems are fairly widespread among Kosovars, but - you'll be familiar with this in Kosovo - they usually depend on having personal contact. And that can make things awkward when it's a matter of passing on unwanted possessions - it means looking someone in the eye as you hand over the trousers with the saggy seat, or admitting to having bought that unwise dress in the first place. If you are a foreigner in Kosovo it also restricts you because your access to communities in desperate need is likely to be limited. When an internationally-posted family moves on from Kosovo, their cleaner or the driver at work, or the lady in the flat downstairs will probably do well out of their cast-offs, but the unemployed, the marginalized, the family from the village - the forgotten - are likely to remain forgotten.

And perhaps all this contributes to the fact that in the bins of Prishtina you can see heaps of perfectly usable clothing and objects which had plenty of life left in them, now tainted with coffee grounds and old nappies and usable by no-one. Of course these then go to landfill and turn another few square meters of Kosovan countryside into stinking, unusable garbage heap.

As you downsize, outsource, clean up or move on this summer, here's to new homes - for individuals and also for the items they leave behind.

Elizabeth Gowing is a founder of The Ideas Partnership, a Kosovan NGO working on educational, cultural and environmental projects. She can be reached at theideaspartnership@gmail.com



Prishtina Insight Launches Child Cancer Campaign

Do you want to help save child's life today? Due to a shortage of funds, children being treated at Prishtina's main public hospital are not being given potentially life-saving tests to detect cancer, Prishtina Insight has discovered.

This newspaper has decided to join the charity Help for Children with Cancer to tackle this tragedy.

Editor Lawrence Marzouk said: "There are many, many worthy causes which people can support in Kosovo so it is difficult to pick one above others.

"But when we heard about this story, we were struck at how easy it would be to have a real impact on children's lives

and felt it important to help out. The test is incredibly effective and simple - all Help for Children with Cancer charity need is financial support to ensure that these tests happen."

Help for Children with Cancer has already raised 40,000 euro to buy the necessary equipment, but a further 15,000 euro is needed to purchase the essential reagents, and this is where you step in.

Your donation will go towards purchasing reagents so these tests can be carried out and Leukaemia, and other cancers, can be diagnosed early, saving lives.

Prishtina Insight is distributing collection boxes across

the city to raise funds. Already almost 20 international organisations have agreed to take part.

If you would like to take part and help raise funds, or

simply install a collection box, please email Shengjyl@birn.eu.com or call +381 38 24 33 58

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