Opinion: Dell and Ismaili Spar Over Pimpsons Cartoon

Kosovo Steel Plant Linked to Russian Oligarch

Prishtina Insight can reveal that Jeton Sadiku, new owner of Kosovo’s Llamkos steel plant, had close ties to one of Russia’s richest oligarchs, and may have been ineligible to buy the facility.

By Lawrence Marzouk and Tinka Kurti

It was billed as a great British investment in Kosovo. But the truth behind the privatisation of the troubled Llamkos steel plant is far more complicated, an investigation by Prishtina Insight can reveal, uncovering a trail leading from the Gulf state of Dubai to the Siberian steppe.

Our probe also raises questions about whether the sale of the plant to Kosovo businessman Jeton Sadiku, and British national, broke privatisation rules.

Prishtina Insight’s investigation of company accounts in Britain, Switzerland, Russia, Kosovo and Dubai shows that the company that purchased Llamkos was not British in the normally understood sense of the word.

The company is based in a Gulf tax haven and is owned by a Kosovo Albanian who holds a British passport. He had close connections to a Russian oligarch and a string of insolvent companies under his belt.

Dubai-based Coresteel DMCC is at least Jeton Sadiku’s fourth steel business. His three other companies in that field – Bel & Steel, Coresteel Ltd and Coresteel AG – have been, or are being, closed for insolvency or for failure to file accounts.

Prishtina Insight has discovered that the forced liquidation of Swiss-based Coresteel AG, following an application to the High Court in London by Fortis Bank to have the firm wound up because of unpaid debts from 2009 onwards, ought to have prevented Sadiku from competing to buy Llamkos. He secured the plant in July 2011 for 5.1 million euro.

Company documents for Bel & Steel and Coresteel AG reveal that Kosovo-born Sadiku has business links with Russian oligarch Andrey Dobrov, rated Russian’s 162nd richest man by Forbes magazine last year with an estimated fortune of 400 million euro.

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By Lawrence Marzouk and Tinka Kurti

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Brussels Reviews EULEX Mission

Cuts in staffing numbers and a handover of responsibilities to Kosovo authorities are among the options on the table as the EU’s top foreign diplomat, Catherine Ashton, reviews EULEX’s remit.

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Kosovo Steel Plant Linked to Russian Oligarch

from page 1

Dobrov made his fortune in the Siberian town of Novosibirsk in coal, steel and construction following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Sadiku says he severed relations with Dobrov and with Dobrov’s former firm, Belon Group, in 2005. Earlier, he admitted to Pristitina Insight, he had been part owner of the Russian coal and steel giant. Coresteel AG goes bust:

According to the latest company statements filed in 2008 in London, where the Swiss firm also has a branch, Coresteel AG made 185 million euros at the end of 2007.

Coresteel AG went into liquidation on 16 June after receiving call-up papers for the Yugoslav army, JNA.

Sadiku directed and part-owned Coresteel AG. Cooper was a board member of Belon Group from 2004, according to a published interview with Dobrov.

According to Swiss public records, Sadiku is the sole owner of Coresteel AG, although it is not clear if he was so throughout the firm’s history. He became director in 2003.

It is not clear whether Coresteel AG also did business with Belon AG – despite the links through Alan Cooper and the similarities in its initial name, Belsteel Management, to Bel & Steel, owned by Dobrov. Cooper has declined to comment.

Questioned about Sadiku’s links with Dobrov, a spokesman for Sadiku said Sadiku had been part owner of Belon Group.

Belon Group has shown interest in investing in the Balkans. In 2005 it bid for, but then withdrew from, the sale of the Pljevlja Power Plant in Montenegro, for example. Questions to Belon Group on their business links with Sadiku, Coresteel and any potential involvement with Llamkos went unanswered.

Sadiku’s spokesman said he had conducted business with Dobrov and Belon up until 2007. Regarding Coresteel AG, which has yet to be formerly liquidated, he would only say that the Swiss-based firm and the Dubai-registered Coresteel DMCC were not connected.

It is true that Jeton Sadiku was an owner of Belon Group along with Andrey Dobrov,” Labinot Demi, spokesman for Coresteel DMCC, said.

“In 2005, Sadiku severed relations with Andrey Dobrov, and Andrey Dobrov inherited the businesses in London; consequently there was no further responsibility on behalf of Jeton Sadiku [for these businesses],” Dendi added.

“As far as the ownership of the Coresteel Company in Dubai is concerned, the Sadiku family owns the company and this is a fact which they do not hide or deny,” he continued.

“Belon is not linked to Coresteel DMCC, which is different to Coresteel AG.”

As Coresteel DMCC is registered in Dubai, a tax haven, it is impossible to independently verify ownership of this company.

**Court battle**

Turkish firm Mutafag Dragun was disqualified as winner of the bidding process in March 2011 despite offering the highest price.

It believes the sale to Coresteel DMCC will be overturned by the Supreme Court to which the company has complained.

It was announced as the winner in March 2011 after making an offer of 65 million euros, but PAK cancelled this decision in June, ruling that it was not convinced of the firm’s business plan or the authenticity of some of the documents offered.

“As a temporary winner, we met all the required conditions such as a guarantee of 30 million dollar banking, maintaining the same activities [at Llamkos], the number of employees, over 72 references, an annual turnover of 28 million euros and management staff,” the firm’s Kosovo representative, Enis Cela, said.

“We have been damaged, based on the fact that the PAK Board bought their preferred company, which was ranked third in [the competition] with a price of 51 million euros,” he said.

“PAK says the winner [of the bid] promised to maintain the number of employees, but this is no excuse because we pledged to hire 457 workers, which is more than the obligation of 437 workers,” Cela added.

**Former problems**

The first sale of Llamkos in 2005 was also heralded as a great success.

Llamkos GalvaSteel is the largest steel galvanizing plant and production facility in the region and has been operating for over 30 years.

Buyer Bulgaria’s Kremikovtsi paid 4.2m euros for the plant and committed itself to investing 15 million euros over two years.

The plant started to work again for the first time since the conflict, but soon after Kremikovtsi was sold to Global Steel of India and problems emerged.

An argument between the two over ownership of Llamkos was followed by calls in the metal industry market, prompting claims by local managers that they could no longer cover staff wages.

By the time the issue was resolved and Global Steel declared the owner, investors had fallen behind schedule and the government was keen to renationalise.

Under the contract struck by the UN-led agency, the Kosovo Trust Agency, the spin-off sale in 2007 included a “recall” clause if the levels of investment were not met.

In December 2010 PAK liquidated Llamkos, paving the way for a new sale.

Yili Kaloshi would not confirm how much Coresteel DMCC had promised to invest, describing it only as “substantial”.

“Regarding the investment, the buyer through the signed contract is required to invest in the company a substantial amount of working and investment capital,” he said.

Box: One of Russia’s richest: Andrey Dobrov, according to his profile in Forbes Magazine, is one of the richest men in Russia. Almost 50 years old, he was born in Kazaksthan before moving to Novosibirsk, he has studied and set up his business.

He is estimated to have a fortune of 400 million euros, making him the 162nd richest Russian, a fortune largely earned through his mining and mineral empire, Belon Group.

He founded and headed Belon in 1993. It started up as a humble video club chain before turning into a coal trader that then diversified into steel galvanizing and processing at the turn of 1990s and the 2000s.

Belen then expanded into transport, service, metal trade, banking and construction. From 2007 through to 2009, Magnitogorsk Iron & Steel Works purchased Dobrov's stake in Belon.

Dobrov retained Bank Belon, which was renamed Bank Vzaimodostav in October 2010. Little was known about his involvement in businesses outside of Russia, until Pristitina Insight discovered his links to the Kosovan businessman Jeton Sadiku.

Sadiku also had a strong stake in the steel industry and strong links to Russia.

Sadiku directed and part-owned Bel & Steel, a UK-based firm involved in the steel trade. Andrey Dobrov owned 90 per cent of the firm, according to official documents sourced by this newspaper.

The firm formed in 1995 went bust in 2002 with more than a million pounds outstanding on debt, including to Dobrov’s own firm Belon, the steel and coal giant based in Novosibirsk, in Siberia.

In September 2001, the similarly named Belsteel Management was set up in Switzerland. Allan Dennis Cooper, an investor in Eastern European businesses who directs a number of companies based in London and Switzerland, was one of the founders with his business partner Christian Sutter.

Its name was quickly changed to Coresteel AG. Cooper was a board member of Belon Group from 2004, according to a published interview with Dobrov.

According to Swiss public records, Sadiku is the sole owner of Coresteel AG, although it is not clear if he was so throughout the firm’s history. He became director in 2003.

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Kosovo Seeks Full Independence in 2012

Kosovo's parliament has adopted a resolution calling for the international community to permit full independence by the end of this year.

By Fatmir Aliu

Four years after seceding from Serbia, Kosovo's parliament has adopted a resolution calling for an end to "internationally supervised" independence at the end of 2012, pleading to meet all obligations needed to reach this goal.

In vote the vote, 83 MPs voted for and 13 against a resolution tabled by Hashim Thaci's ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, at an extraordinary session called on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Thaci said adoption of the resolution marked the beginning of a new phase for Kosovo.

"Kosovo enters a new era," he said, calling on the international community to set the benchmarks and priorities for the work needed to be done in implementing the remaining provisions of the Comprehensive Kosovo Status Settlement Proposal, known as the Ahtisaari Plan.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. Since then 86 states, including 22 EU member states and the US, have recognized it.

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In March 2008, Sadiku also resigned.

The company carried out no transactions and was dissolved in August 2010, according to the official record.

Despite this, PAK announced it as the winner of the bidding process in August 2011. A press release emphasized that a "British" firm had won.

But the sale contract was signed in August 21, 2011, between Dino Asano, then head of PAK, and Adrian Holmes, who is a representative of the Dubai firm and who now manages the Vushtrri plant under the name of Coresteel DMCC.

In November, Llamkos was visited by the British inter-parliamentary Union delegation, including a number of UK parliamentarians, as an example of British investment in Kosovo.

Lord Wallace of Salen told the House of Lords in September 2011, "We were delighted recently when the British company Coresteel completed the purchase of the Llamkos steel plant."

Pak has since admitted that it was actually bought by the Dubai-based Coresteel DMCC.

Little is known of Coresteel UK as no accounts were filed and its activities are shrouded in secrecy.

Asked whether, given the problems with other Coresteel companies, Pak had verified the origin of its funds, spokesman Ylli Kaloshi said, "For us it is sufficient that the payment is made through the bank, as banks handle and verify the origin of the funds more than 100,000 euro. We do not ask for anything more."

Coresteel Shpk, registered in Vushtrri, where the plant is located, is owned by Coresteel DMCC, with "authorised persons", usually referred to as managers or those allowed on behalf of the company, named at the office of the business register as Arlind Jupolli, a Prishtina-based lawyer, and Jeton Sadiku.

According to its website, www.coresteel.net, it has offices in Lebanon, the UAE, London and now Vushtrri.

It describes itself as an "international metals and mining company with offices and agents placed in strategic locations throughout the world", but its only fixed asset listed is the Llamkos steel plant.

PRISTINA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT “ADEM JASHARI”
Brussels Reviews EULEX Mission

The European Union is considering “re-formatting” of EULEX ahead of a decision on a new budget for the rule-of-law mission.

By Petrit Collaku

Cuts in staffing numbers and a hand-over of responsibilities to Kosovo authorities are among the options on the table as the EU’s top foreign diplomat, Catherine Ashton, reviews EULEX’s remit.

Ashton’s office told Pristina Insight that a strategic review is under way to structure and priorities of EULEX, which will involve input from many stakeholders, including EULEX and the Government of Kosovo.

Recommendations arising from this review must then be approved by EU member states. “It is possible that the mission will be subject to a reformation during the next twelve months, taking into account the progress made by Kosovo authorities in the rule of law and the needs of changing the mission,” Maja Kocijancic, spokeswoman for the chief of EU foreign policy, told Pristina Insight.

Kocijancic added that the next meeting of EU foreign ministers is expected to be held on February 27 but she did not confirm if the meeting will discuss the changes in EULEX’s mission.

Pristina Insight understands that once the new strategy has been defined in a new budget, starting from June, is likely to be mooted in April or May.

Kosovo officials said they were confident that the EULEX mission will change, regardless of the progress of the Kosovo institutions.

Bekim Collaku, chief of the cabinet of the Prime Minister, said that the review should look at areas such as customs and police, and that it is the first phase of EULEX’s exit strategy.

He reiterated that the “reformation” of the EU mission comes as a result of a positive assessment of Kosovo institutions by an EU fact-finding team, which were on the ground last year.

“We see developments in regions like in Mitrovica and Prizren, no EULEX police officers will be stationed due to the good performance of the police. The same goes for customs,” said Collaku.

He added that he expected EU to cut the staffing levels of the mission, which is costly.

However, according to him, the EULEX mandate will not change. “In the judiciary, and justice in general, it will continue as their expertise is crucial added Collaku.

EULEX has also confirmed the mission will change, but has not announced which changes are expected. The developments come at a time when plans are being made to end the period of supervised independence of the country.

On January 27, leaders of all parliamentary parties, except for the Vetevendosje movement, met and signed a declaration on the end of supervised independence.

EULEX is the largest mission of its kind, with its primary purpose to support the Kosovo authorities in the rule of law, in particular policing, judiciary and customs.

The mission has 3,000 employees, with 1,100 local staff. Contributing states include all countries of the European Union as well as Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, Croatia, and the US.

In a documentary recently aired by Deutsche Welle on EULEX, it appeared that the mission had spent 400,000 euro on sending customs personnel to the north to avoid the road blocks.

The European Union in December approved EULEX’s budget for the six months to June 2012.

The mission saw a 10 per cent reduction in its funds, and money has been also reallocated to improve witness protection and pay for the new unit dedicated to the Marty investigation.

North Kosovo Serbs Dismiss Tadic Plan

Serbian President’s “four-point proposal” to resolve the stalemate in ethnically riven Kosovo has received the thumbs down from local Serbs and from the nationalist opposition in Serbia.

By Marija Ristic

Kosovo Serbs have dismissed Serbian President Boris Tadic’s plan to end the turbulent North Kosovo solution, saying it was a “red herring” plan designed to promote political recognition of Kosovo’s independence.

Tadic’s proposal was presented to the so-called Quint of European Union states in December approved EULEX’s budget for the six months to June 2012. The mission saw a 10 per cent reduction in its funds, and money has been also reallocated to improve witness protection and pay for the new unit dedicated to the Marty investigation.

The plan recommended international recognition of Kosovo’s independence in return for Kosovo government agreement to decentralization and special protection for minorities, including education in their own languages, special health services and broad autonomy.

Aleksandar Vucic, vice president of Serbia’s opposition nationalist Progressive Party, also condemned the President’s proposals, stating that he saw nothing new in the plan. Tadic’s plan has not been discussed in detail to the public. He sent a detailed version of the “four-point proposal” to the so-called Quint countries [Germany, France, Italy, Britain and US] this month but the plan itself was not made available for the broader public.

However, the plan is believed to advocate special status for Serbian Orthodox monasteries in Kosovo, guarantees for Serbs in the south of Kosovo, resolution of Serbian property claims and a special solution for mainly Serb northern Kosovo.

According to media reports Tadic’s approach leaves aside the thorny question of Kosovo’s status. Serbia has refused to recognise Kosovo’s independence.

Gerrard Gallucci, former UN Regional Representative to Kosovo, said the plan deserved consideration.

“The recent four-point proposal by President Boris Tadic may provide the foundation for a lasting solution,” Gallucci said in an article published on the website of British think tank TransConflict.

The British and French ambassadors to Serbia and Kosovo have welcomed the plan as well, reportedly agreeing that the proposals “could open the door to a lasting solution”.

The plan was also presented to Philip Reeker, Deputy US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, during his visit to Belgrade last week.

After the meeting, Borislav Stefanovic, chief of the Serbian negotiating team with Kosovo, said the US showed understanding for the plan.

BIRN Launches 2012 Balkans Journalism Fellowship

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network has announced a call for applications for its 2012 fellowship for journalistic excellence.

fellows are expected to deliver investigative stories of no more than 2,000 words, and will receive a 2,000 euro bursary up to another 2,000 euro for travel and research expenses and will attend career development seminars in Vienna and Skopje.

In addition, the top three articles, again judged by an independent committee, will attract awards of 4,000 euro, 3,000 euro and 1,000 euro.

Completed articles will be published in English and local languages in regional and European online and print media.

Remzi Lani, director of the Albanian Media Institute and a member of the programme’s selection committee, described the fellowship as “a success story.”

“Publication of the fellows’ articles in the most important media in the region and internationally is certainly clear proof that this project is a worthy venture - an opportunity that should not be missed,” he said.

The closing date for applications is March 5, 2012. The application form, guidelines and further information about the fellowship are available online.

The fellowship was established in 2007 by the Robert Bosch Foundation and EURE, in cooperation with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, to promote journalistic excellence and advance balanced coverage of complex reform issues that have regional and European Union significance.
Dropped PTK Advisor Leaves with Million-Euro Fee

Telco AG may have been dropped from its role advising the Ministry of Economic Development on the now delayed sale of PTK – but the Liechtenstein-based firm has still walked away with its 1.1 million euro fee.

T he Ministry of Economic Development is expected to select its third set of advisors for the delayed sale of Kosovo's most lucrative public firm, Post Telecoms of Kosovo, soon.

Just a few months after the appointment of Telco AG in October 2009, and allegedly under pressure from international actors in Kosovo, the government appointed a second tier of advisors for a further 500,000 euros to supervise the work of Telco AG and its consortium.

The Ministry says it decided to end the contract with Telco AG as a hiatus in the process had not been predicted, while the consultants suggested that they had walked away because they did not believe it was the right time to sell PTK.

Advisors' Galore

Just a few months after the appointment of Telco AG in October 2009, and allegedly under pressure from international actors in Kosovo, the government appointed a second tier of advisors for a further 500,000 euros to supervise the work of Telco AG and its consortium.

Sources close to the process described the decision at the time as “highly unusual” and said it was motivated by concerns among international diplomats about Telco’s relatively unknown status.

The Liechtenstein-based telecommunications firm had, as a company, yet to establish itself as a major name in the telecoms consultancy market, although its staff include a number of consultants who have worked on major privatization deals in the region.

In an earlier investigation, Prishtina Insight discovered that the firm has been dogged by a series of unofficial and official complaints levied against it in another field in which it operated.

For a number of years, Telco AG rented out premium rate, Liechtenstein-based numbers across the world, according to complaints from phone users on internet forums, and in a case taken out by the Italian telecommunications regulatory authority, have not always been used in accordance with the law.

According to mobile phone users in different corners of the world, complaining on internet forums, they were contacted by text messages with news that they had won a prize and were given a number to call which was owned by Telco AG. Those who followed up the text with a call where then charged premium rates without their knowledge, it is alleged.

The Liechtenstein-based firm was also fined 100,000 Euros in 2009 in Italy for providing premium-rate numbers to an erotic phone service which did not advertise the cost of calls, according to the official findings of an investigation seen by Prishtina Insight.

Telco AG, according to its website, has stopped selling international premium-rate numbers.

In an earlier briefing note sent to Prishtina Insight, Telco AG said it was “merely the owner of numbers and not responsible for services provided by those renting the numbers.”

The firm’s relationship with Mobilkom Austria, which was among the last two in the running to buy PTK before Deutsche Telekom’s withdrawal, also came under scrutiny. Telco AG admitted it acted as advisors to Mobilkom Austria in a number of previous transactions in the region, including in Kosovo, but said it no longer works for the Austrian mobile giant.

The earlier investigation also revealed that Telco AG paid the US lobbying firm Rhoads Group USD 75,000, 55,000 euro, in the run-up to the tender decision, according to official lobbying reports filed in US Senate Office of Public Records, to lobby the “State Department” in Kosovo and the US about issues related to the tender.

No other firms in the process used US lobbyists.

Among the team assigned to lobby in Kosovo was Shawn Sullivan, who was brought in from another lobbying firm, Cassidy & Associates, where he was senior vice-president.

From 1995 to 2003, Sullivan served in various capacities at the US Departments of State and Defense. In 2003, he was appointed political advisor to the NATO Commander General in Kosovo and later as the NATO Secretary General’s personal representative to Serbia.

Telco told Prishtina Insight in an earlier interview that the decision to employ lobbyists was a legitimate tactic, aimed at “neutralising” other US-based bids.

End of a Relationship

The Ministry of Economic Development said that the contract with Telco AG was cancelled as the “restating of the process was not foreseen according to the contract”.

“The engagement of a professional consultant with experience in transactions in this process is necessarily rather than a desire,” a spokesman added. He added that the ministry was satisfied with the six pre-qualified firms, who, he said, had a “global reputation in this field.”

Harald Grytten, of Telco AG, said that it decided not to pursue the contract as it felt the market was not correct to privatise PTK.

“We agreed with the Ministry of Economic Development to terminate our relationship and our contract based on the market situation and privatization climate in Kosovo,” he said. “We believe that timing is not correct now, and would therefore prefer not to continue the process as is.”

“However, we wish our successor luck in the continuation of the privatization process, and hope that the project will bring the success the Ministry has proclaimed and is seeking.”

Ministry of Interior Built New Offices Illegally

The Ministry of Interior has added two floors to its new building in the heart of Prishtina without planning permission, Prishtina Insight has learnt.

The building, located opposite the State Prosecution and the Supreme Court and next to the former OSCE building, was built by the construction firm Albes to the initial specification for 1.8 million euro, after a tender in October 2009.

But last year, the ministry decided to add a further two floors – a cost of almost 500,000 euro - without receiving permission from the municipal authority in Prishtina.

The town hall then refused to grant the ministry retrospective planning permission.

The issue, the newspaper has learnt, has now been passed to the Anti-Corruption Agency.

The building will become the Municipal Centre for Civil Registry (MCCRA) and Vehicle Registration Centre (ORA).

Luljeta Ceku, who was director of the planning department at Municipality of Prishtina until recently, confirmed to Prishtina Insight that the extra floors did not have a building permit.

The Ministry said that it had met all conditions set by the municipality and provided all the relevant information.

“MIA has met all conditions set forth, but the Municipality of Prishtina, respectively the Department of Urbanism, has not answered on the basis of the Construction Law 2004 15,” said a spokesman.

The Ministry also added that it had encountered difficulties in communicating with the former director of urbanism, who, it said, “had not offered cooperation and has not responded in the legal terms”.

The Anti-Corruption Agency has expressed an interest in the matter on January 4, 2012 and has asked the Department of Urbanism of the Municipality of Prishtina for documents related to the affair.

Muharem Mavraj, director of Albes, told the newspaper that it needed only a further ten working days to complete construction. “Currently works are to stop because of bad weather.”
EU Prosecutor Refuses to Testify in Limaj Trial

After an EU prosecutor, Maurizio Salustro, refused to testify in the Klecka case, saying he had immunity as an international staffer, Fatmir Limaj’s defence asked the Chief Prosecutor to suspend the Italian lawyer from the trial.

Kosovo Fines Officials For Not Declaring Assets

Prishtina’s Minor Court has punished senior public officials for not honouring a deadline to declare their assets, fining most of them 300 euros

Thousands Oppose "Discriminatory" Law in Kosovo

Thousands of protesters braved freezing temperatures in Prizren, Kosovo, on Sunday to protest against a law aimed at protecting the city’s historic centre, which opponents say favours the Serb Orthodox Church.

The political heat centres on point four of article 18 of the law, which says that “the agreement of the Serbian Orthodox Church” is required for any activities that would affect the Serbian Orthodox Church’s properties in the Historic Centre of Prizren.

The adoption of the draft-law, in this form, will lead to the federalization of governance in Prizren, by creating two institutional units, the existing one and the Historical Centre, with exclusive powers,” the head of the Centre for the Defence of Human Rights and Liberties in Prizren, Bashkim Kajdomcaj, said.

“The citizens concerns should be heard and listened to,” he told the protesters, while announcing that the coalition of NGOs will address the issue to the Constitutional Court.

The law aimed at protecting Prizren’s historical zone faces a strong backlash.
New scientific research has revealed that the country has several potential sites for viable wind farms.

**World Bank Experts Back Coal**

World Bank experts have backed the government’s plans for a new coal power plant of 600 megawatts, provided that the plant is split into two units that produce 300 megawatts.

But the experts also call for more exploration of hydropower, wind power, and geothermal to cut the losses, both technical and commercial, of electricity.

The trio of experts were brought in by the World Bank to evaluate whether the government’s Kosovo e Re power plant project meets the organization’s guidelines.

The World Bank must now decide whether to provide the financial guarantee to the project, which has been requested by the government.

The World Bank has said it will pay for a study of renewable energy in Kosovo but only if it backs a proposed new coal-powered plant.

The government is expected to announce the winner bidder to build the new power plant this month.

Prequalified companies to build Kosovo e Re are: Consortium Adani Power/PT Adani Global, from India and Indonesia; the consortium of AES Electric Ltd and Demir Export A.S. from the US and Turkey; Park Holding Submisión from Turkey and the consortium PPC and Contour Global LLP, from Greece, Britain and the US.

**Wind Tunnels Promise Green Energy For Kosovo**

Scientists have for the first time pinpointed potential sites in Kosovo for wind farms capable of generating significant amounts of renewable energy.

Electricity demand in Kosovo is currently 1,000 MW, 99 per cent of which comes from the state-run Kosovo Energy Corporation, KEK, with use of lignite coal.

It is hoped that the use of renewable energy could lessen Kosovo’s dependence on polluting fossil fuel.

While wind speeds in the country’s towns and cities are believed to be insufficient for wind turbines, a number of suitable locations have been found where a wind-tunnel effect is created between two mountainous zones.

Wind tunnels are open spaces where wind is channelled between two objects, be that buildings or mountains.

A study carried out last year by the Hydrometeorology Institute of Kosovo, and funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and a ring to an earlier report by Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology and a PhD thesis.

Potential sites include the village of Landovica, near Prizren, a corridor between Fushe Kosovo and Shitme and near the Drini i Bardh river in the west.

Perhaps the most promising site is in the east, near Kamenica, where speeds of up to 8 m/s have been recorded.

Investment in renewable energy is costly, Tahirsylaj says, but worthwhile.

“The dust that we inhale in Prishtina comes from the KEK [power stations],” he added.

His report concludes that Kosovo has great potential for wind energy. “There are enough locations. All the ones I mentioned in my study have great potential for using wind energy,” Tahirsylaj says.

He said that Kosovo needs to spread this message to foreign investors.

**Private prospects:**

A report this week by the Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory of the University of California, Berkeley, on Kosovo’s energy future, also speaks optimistically of its prospects.

“Studies of wind energy potential of Kosovo vary widely,” the report reads, referring to an earlier report by Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and a PhD thesis.

The study also notes that three private operators have so far applied to build wind farms, which, if they get permits, will produce almost 350 megawatts of energy.

To date, the private development of wind farms has not proved easy.

The first attempt in Kosovo to exploit wind to make electricity was by “Wind Power”, a private German-Kosovar company.

This company installed three windmills by 2008, but the KEK disconnected them from the network after the firm failed to reach an agreement with the energy regulator about prices. According to KEK, the firm was not entitled to pay the required price of 84 euro per MWh, allegedly because the firm used old equipment.

The firm disputed the regulator’s set price of 48 euro per MWh, saying it would force them to work at a loss.

Wind Power invested 800,000 euro initially and had hoped to bring this figure up to 2.4 million.

The government says it is still working towards the promotion of electricity production through wind by setting incentive fees and guaranteed sales.

“From our information from various stakeholders investing in wind energy, they are developing... feasibility studies concerning wind power in the region of Mitrovica in Bajgora and their measurements show the good potential of wind power,” says Gezim Baxhaku, an adviser to the ministry of economic development.

But if the investors apply “outdated technology, the energy sales rate is not guaranteed by contractual incentives but by market prices,” Baxhaku added, referring to the Wind Power case.

Baxhaku also said several measures have been taken in the Zatriq area of Rahovac by interested private firms and the results were encouraging.
Downturn Prompts Belgrade Chinese to Shut Up Shop

After more than three years of dwindling sales, more and more Chinese traders are leaving Belgrade.

Su Lin is busy cleaning the floor of his half empty shoe shop in a Chinese shopping centre in New Belgrade’s Block 70. On the left hand side of the shop there are three shelves with a scattering of shoes and stacked up against the opposite wall are about 30 boxes. That’s all he has left in his shop.

The little stock he has was bought from another trader who previously rented the shop before deciding it was time to leave the Serbian capital. “There is no money, no money at all. No one is buying,” says Su Lin who left China five years ago and has been trading in Serbia ever since. “Only five people have ever passed by the shop since I opened an hour ago. I don’t want to order any more shoes as I simply don’t know if I will be able to sell them.”

When he first arrived in Belgrade, the shopping centre was crowded every day. Now, he says, it is not even busy at weekends. “I hoped that before New Year’s Eve things would improve but they didn’t. It was just like today, not a single person came in to buy anything.”

Lin is just one of the many Chinese who are thinking that it’s time to pack their bags and try their luck elsewhere. Block 70 is a magnet for Chinese traders. It is home to two shopping centres built a decade ago and packed to the rafters with all kinds of goods from China. Until recently they were also a mecca for Serbian shoppers hunting for bargains.

A council to the shopping centres’ Chinese shopkeepers however, the amount of money that Serbs have left in their pockets after paying for essentials is now so little that even cheap Chinese products are too expensive for them.

Three Serbian shop assistants say that the turnover in the shops where they work has fallen drastically since 2006. “I know my boss is thinking of leaving Belgrade and just waiting for the best opportunity,” says one. “I hope he’ll let me know in time so I can look for another job.”

Relations with China date back to the Tito era. With a few ups and downs, Yugoslavia and China had friendly relations since 1948. After the country’s demise though relations became even closer for Serbia during the heyday of Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic. His government relaxed visa requirements for Chinese citizens who began arriving in Serbia in the late ’90s. The biggest influx of Chinese immigrants came between 1998 and 2002.

There are no exact figures on how many Chinese currently live in Belgrade, but according to some estimates three years ago there were about 6,000 in the Serbian capital. Liu Feng Dun, vice president of the Chinese Union of Serbia, says that when he first arrived in Belgrade, 14 years ago, Serbia had a stable market and Belgraders had money to spend. Back in China, says Dun, Yugoslavia has a reputation for having a welcoming, educated population that enjoy a high standard of living.

Dun, a medical and marketing graduate decided to come to Serbia when he was still a young boy. I watched the Yugoslav movie Walter Defends Sarajevo at least ten times. It was huge in China,” says Dun laughing.

Dun says that once one family decided to move they were quickly followed by another. In some places 20 per cent of the population packed up and moved to Serbia, where they received a friendly welcome. “People were really kind and life was good. Chinese shops were crowded as shoppers wanted Chinese products,” says Dun. However, the economic crisis has slashed Serbs’ purchasing power. New customs tariffs that have forced up the price of Chinese goods have also added to the woes of Chinese shopkeepers, just as they began to find themselves facing stiff competition from cheap goods imported from Turkey and Taiwan.

Traders have a lot of unsold stock and dwindling profits, so they are deciding to leave,” says Dun who adds that even though rents in Block 70 have fallen in the past three years to just a few hundred euros a month it’s not enough to convince traders to stay,” said Dun.

“When I came here you could buy one German mark for three dinars, but now a euro is worth 105 dinars,” he says. “That’s the difference between doing business here ten years ago and today. Bad business doesn’t make for a happy life.”

The Chinese started leaving Serbia in 2008, but in 2010 and 2011 a record breaking 3,000 Chinese left the country. The majority went to Poland and Croatia, but they also headed out to oil rich African countries, Latin America and the U.S. “Many Chinese are literally on standby, waiting to see how things will pan out in Serbia. I expect that a lot of them will leave in the next two years,” he added.

Serbia Trade With Russia Grew in 2011

Serbia’s exports to Russia grew by almost sixty per cent last year, while imports rose by 17 per cent.

The Serbian Chamber of Commerce, PKS, said that Serbian exports to Russia grew by 57 percent in 2011 and reached 794.2 million dollars in 11 months.

According to the PKS, trade between Serbia and the Russian Federation totalled just over 3 billion dollars, which is 25 per cent more than the first eleven months of 2010. Macedonia Plans to Revive FDI to 2008 Level

Macedonia plans to restore foreign investments in 2012 to the level last seen in 2008, one year before the global economic downturn sliced investments in half.

Macedonian government says it hopes to attract some 380 million in foreign investment this year, about the same amount that the country attracted in 2008. “This would mark a significant step towards the country’s gradual recovery from the crisis,” a spokesperson of the Economy Ministry, Suzana Pranjic, told Pristina Insight.

Serbia Telekom Buys Up Greek Shares

Serbia Telekom is now entirely domestically owned, after the firm bought up the remaining shares owned by Greek OTE for 330 million euro.

Telekom Srbija director Branko Rajkovic and Michael Tsamts, the executive director of Greek OTE, signed the contract on the transfer of OTE’s shares to Telekom Srbija in the presence of Serbian President Boris Tadic and Prime Minister Mirko Cvetkovic.

OTE, whose biggest shareholder is Deutsche Telekom, had been the owner of 20 per cent of the Serbian telecoms firm since 1997.
Church Almost Burned in Struga, Macedonia

An Orthodox church was set on fire on Monday night in the latest in a series of violent incidents that started when Muslims in Struga took offence at a local carnival.

 artır

The village of Vevcani, which is a town of different religions and ethnicities.

Privatization of Albanian Monuments Opposed

A proposal to sell off some 40 castles and towers has encountered stiff opposition among archeologists and historians.

Croatian TV Risks Row Over Serbian Film

Defying a request from the broadcasting regulator, Croatia’s RTL says it will air a popular Serbian movie on Sunday without dubbing or subtitles.

Unknown arsonists on Monday night set ablaze an Orthodox church near Struga in south-west Macedonia in the latest in a series of ethnic and faith-related incidents in the area.

The trouble dates back to a village carnival where locals wore masks deemed offensive to Muslim Albanians.

Firefighters fought till midnight to douse the fire at the St. Nicholas church in the ethnically mixed village of Labunishta near Struga.

Police on Tuesday said they saved the 200-year-old church from the blaze but the nearby facilities had burned to the ground, including the parish dining hall.

Last Friday Muslims in Struga staged protests over what they said were insulting masks worn in a nearby village festival.

On January 14, at the annual carnival in Vevcani, ethnic Albanians wore masks supposedly representing Muslim believers, including women in burqas.

Following the peaceful protest on Friday other incidents occurred over the weekend, including the burning of a Macedonian flag, an attack on a church and the stoning of a bus.

On Saturday, a local ambulance in the village of Labunishta, known to employ locals from Vevcani, was also pelted with stones.

In another incident on Sunday in the village of Borovec, a cross standing in the courtyard of the Orthodox church was demolished.

"This nonsense must stop," Valentina Bozninovska, head of the national Commission for Religious Communities, told Pristina Insight on Monday.

The Commission is to hold an emergency session on Tuesday in parliament to discuss the issue.

The village of Vevcani, which is almost exclusively populated by Macedonians, has issued a press release saying their intention was not to offend anyone. They said the violence was "politically motivated".

But Ramiz Merko, the ethnic Albanian mayor of Struga, who took part in Friday’s protest, said the townspople had every right to protest. He too called for stop to the incidents.

"I participated because the feelings of the Muslim populations were offended," he said. "I would do the same and support the Orthodox [Christian] population if they ever felt offended over something."

All the main political parties in Macedonia on Monday condemned the violence as did the Islamic Religious Community. Albanian Muslims make up about a quarter of the population of Macedonia but form a local majority in Struga and in most parts of the west of the country.

Struga has seen trouble before. In 2009 fights between Macedonian and Albanian high-school students left several youngsters injured. The authorities then decided to establish ethnically separate school shifts.

In 2001 Macedonia suffered a short-lived armed conflict between the Macedonian security forces and ethnic Albanian rebels. The hostilities ended with the signing of a peace deal that same year that granted greater rights to the country’s Albanians.

Privatization of Albanian Monuments Opposed

T he plan, spearheaded by the head of the Institute of Monuments, Apollon Bace, envisages the sale of 99-year leases to private companies.

These will then have the right to turn the historic sites into bars, cafes and inns while investing in their restoration.

In an interview for the daily newspaper Shqiptarja, Bace maintained that this is standard practice "all over the world". He says it is also backed by Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the Minister of Culture, Aido Bumi.

However, the proposal, which could be acted on as soon as next month, has drawn a fierce response from historians, archaeologists and architects, some of whom accuse the authorities of failing to safeguard the nation’s heritage.

"The proposal from the Ministry of Culture to give concessions for cultural heritage monuments is an awful idea," historian Auron Tare said.

"The state’s rejection of its responsibilities for cultural heritage and the transfer of this responsibility to private hands is testimony to the collapse of state institutions," Tare said, adding that the consequences "will be unimaginable and unrecoverable."

The Institute of Monuments has in the past rented two medieval castles to private companies and Tare maintains that the results of this exercise were poor.

"If the authorities cannot even control two single projects, the question is how will they be able to control more monuments?" he asked.

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"If the authorities cannot even control two single projects, the question is how will they be able to control more monuments?" he asked.
Music Falls Silent in Kosovo

Chronic shortages of cash and instruments have left Kosovo’s few dedicated music schools in a semi-ruined state, while music classes of any type at all in many ordinary schools are just a memory.

“Starting from the primary schools up to the top, music schools are in a terrible condition,” he said.

“Classes take place in facilities that do not have even the most basic conditions for work and which have received no investment for decades. “This situation will remain as it is while we have leaders who do not value art or know what music is,” he added. “All they know is how to get rich.”

Smashes windows in elite academy:

Built after the Second World War, the Prenk Jakova Music School in Prishtina started life as a carpet factory, then was used as a hospital, and today is the capital’s only professional, publicly funded music school.

Despite that, it has a chronic lack of facilities. Some 550 students of secondary school age are taught by 70 professors in rooms with smashed windows, broken floorboards and no insulation.

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Professor Ahmet Dergut, who teaches singing in Prishtina, said lack of investment in music in schools was stunting the development of musical talent in Kosovo.

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“Classes take place in facilities that do not have even the most basic conditions for work and which have received no investment for decades.
Kosovo’s Schools

“We know this is not okay, but schools are lacking other rooms too, and not only for music,” said Pristina Municipality.

Problems across Kosovo:

Kosovo has a total of only six professional music schools and conditions in all but one of them are just as poor as they are in Pristina.

Nexhat Cocaj, director of education in Prizren municipality, said that the city’s Lorenç Antoni professional music school, which has 150 students, lacks decent facilities.

“There is no equipment, the building is old, there is no space - they don’t have even basic conditions,” he said.

As for the presence of dedicated music rooms in primary schools, he believes the situation in the city is “alarming”.

In Gjilan, Gëzim Pirraj, a professor at the town’s professional music school, said their conditions were also poor.

“Even in elementary schools, music teachers are often not taken on as there is nowhere for them to teach,” he noted.

Mitrovica’s director of education told Balkan Insight that there were virtually no dedicated music rooms in this northern town.

“I can say that hardly any elementary schools in Mitrovica have music rooms,” Ali Bejtaj said.

“We are the only school in Kosovo to have a music building that offers all the necessary features,” the director, Astrit Pallaska, said.

Gjakova hits right note:

While just three primary schools in the western town of Gjakova have dedicated rooms, the town’s one professional music school is well equipped following major investment.

After 40 years of neglect, the Prenk Jakova school received a major face-lift from the Ministry of Education with the help from Swiss funds in 2010.

The school has produced some internationally well-known musicians, some of whom have played with the Vienna Philharmonic, such as Shkelzen Doli and Rrauf Dhoni.

“We are the only school in Kosovo to have a music building that offers all the necessary features,” the director, Astrit Pallaska, said.

The school covers 1,420 square meters, has nine classrooms, a room for listening to music and a concert hall with 270 seats.

Ragip Gjoshi, spokesperson at the Ministry of Education, said that in their 2012 budget they came up with funds to construct a new facility for the Prenk Jakova school which was then provided scholarships to good students, which is how he was able to study in Belgrade, and completed a master degree in Sarajevo.

He said around 120,000 euros has been allocated for the building, and they were now looking for a site in the municipality for the new school.

But this sum is well below the amount dedicated to its counterpart in Gjakova, which received 1 million euro.

Gjoshi said that they would consider co-financing with Pristina municipality or were looking for donor funds to make up the rest.

“Besides this investment, there were none in musical education during 2012,” Gjoshi said.

As for the lack of music rooms in primary schools in Kosovo, he said that professors have to “compensate for the lack of rooms, as almost every school in Kosovo possesses at least one musical instrument through which music teachers can teach lessons in class”.

Better back in the 1970s:

Professor Derguti, a singing teacher in Pristina, disagrees with this assessment. He says very few instruments of any type are available in schools.

“Music, schools and opera indicate a civilized state, and every emancipated state invests in this direction, except Kosovo,” he said.

“Music in Kosovo is the last thing that our institutions deal with. Kosovo is the only country in the region that does not have an opera house,” Derguti said.

“Conditions in Kosovo for students learn are so tough that I deeply regret that talented students here don’t have the opportunity to be educated properly,” he added.

Derguti recalled that matters were better in the 1970s when Kosovo was part of Yugoslavia and when he studied in Belgrade.

“At that time, Yugoslavia invested in this field. Although the music schools were in Serbia, Albanians were able to study there and the staff at that time were of a high standard.”

He said that each municipality then provided scholarships to good students, which is how he was able to study in Belgrade, and completed a master degree in Sarajevo.

He was the first Kosovo Albanian professor of music with a master’s degree, he noted.

The situation had deteriorated markedly in the 1980s under the grim regime of Slobodan Milosevic, and has yet to recover.

“Politics destroys everything, like music and many other fields,” he said.

“From the time that Milosevic took away Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989 and destroyed the school system, removing Albanians from jobs, the professors had to hold classes in their own homes,” he recalled.

“I taught students in my apartment for six years. This situation continued for 10 years until the war began in 1998,” he said.

“But since we returned after the war in Kosovo, the teaching has continued in difficult conditions.”

While schools received funding, he said, music did not.

“Music has remained the same as before the war, stuck in the worst buildings which don’t offer basic conditions.”

“This situation will not change until our leaders are changed for other leaders who know what culture, art, music and opera are,” he concluded.

Students at Prenk Jakova suffer poor conditions and broken windows.
Ghost Companies Stalk

Aspiration to become a regional electricity powerhouse by building hundreds of new power plants are running into sand amid allegations of corruption and murky bidding procedures.

Energy 'superpower' still in the dark:

Albania's Energy Association, IA, an umbrella group of investors in the energy market, says Albania is currently using only 40 per cent of its hydro potential for the production of electricity.

The country has a total installed capacity of 1,461 megawatt and an average hydropower production of 5,267 gigawatt hours a year. Its main hydro power stations are located in the cascade of the river Drin in northern Albania.

The power generation system has seen no major investment since the early 1980s when the cash-strapped Communist regime stopped investing in new hydropower dams.

After the fall of Communism, demand for energy grew rapidly. The power grid is estimated to need $1.6 billion in investments to eliminate the risk of power outages.

A drought that engulfed the Balkans in the summer of 2007 reduced the ability of the state-owned power corporation, KESH, to generate electricity from its hydropower plants, leading to outages of 16 hours a day in some areas.

Facing a cold winter this year, the government is struggling to underwrite costly electricity imports. The hum of generators has become a familiar sound again as the country faces new power shortages.

KESH says it faces difficulties in maintaining supplies owing to a combination of dry weather and accumulated debts from the privatized electricity distributor, CEZ Distribution.

KESH says CEZ owes roughly 50 million euro in unpaid electricity as a result of which the company is facing difficulties in securing costly imports. But CEZ is refusing to pay the debt while it says state-owned companies and public institutions owe it nearly 150,000 million euro.

With KESH's finances in a precarious situation, parliament last November acted to liberalize the power market, removing subsidies for industrial consumers like the steelworks company, Kurum.

As a result, the Turkish company, operating a plant in the economically depressed city of Elbasan, closed it doors on January 12, suspending more than 700 workers, saying it had failed to secure electricity on the market at "a reasonable price."

Murky tenders:

From 2006 till now Albania's government has awarded 110 concessionary agreements for a total installed power of 1,300 megawatts and an investment value of nearly 3 billion euro.

But not all the companies that have won tenders have demonstrated that they have the financial capacity to complete these investments.

Data obtained by the AKBN shows that the majority of the envisioned power plants are either not built at all, or construction is still at the initial phase, while deadlines zoom for the completion of the projects.

Research by Prishtina Insight into complaints and administrative investigations carried out by the Procurement Advocate Office, AVP, shows more than a third of the tenders have turned out to be problematic.

Complaints to the AVP about tenders for hydro power station concessions account for 95 percent of the total number of complaints registered against the ministry of energy as a contracting authority since 2007, when the office first opened.

Since 2006, AVP has received nearly 40 complaints from various companies about the 110 power plant construction tenders.

Following up on these complaints, AVP auditors found nearly two dozen instances in which tendering rules had not been respected.

In many of its investigations, AVP says the way that the ministry drafted standard documents for concessionary procedures was incomplete.

"The information presented in the documents of the concessionary procedures...is not only unclear but lacks elements, which create confusion in the economic operators interested [in the tender]," the AVP writes in a ruling concerning a dispute over a power station on the Gomsije river.

In another tender, held in 2006 for the construction of a hydro power plant on the river Benc in the Tepelena region, the AVP found that an Italian company, Radija Energy, was disqualified from the tender after the energy ministry provided the company with the wrong information concerning the technical scale of project.

In a tender for the Fani Vogel river, which was conditioned by the construction of Albania-Kosovo highway, an opinion from the road department of the Ministry of Transport was required.

Because the bidders did not file their offers electronically, the ministry tendering commission then annulled the whole procedure instead of simply requesting electronic files from the bidding companies. This was a breach of the law on public procurement.

In a tender held in December 2007 to construct a power plant that would have used water from a reservoir, the tendering commission took almost 10 months to issue a ruling on the proposals after opening the offers.

"The commission charged with evaluating the offers unjustifiably extended the review procedure," the AVP noted.

In many cases the AVP advised the Public Procurement Agency to discipline staff responsible for breaching administrative tendering rules in the contracting authority.

But Prishtina Insight has found no evidence that the recommend disciplinary measures were ever acted on.

In an investigation from the...
Albania's Energy Ambitions

A VP in 2009, ministry staff refused to grant auditors of the Procurement Advocate’s office access to documents for more than three months.

Corruption claims:

Problems in the process of awarding concessionary contracts for power plants came to the fore in September 2010. It then emerged that the husbands of ruling Democratic Party MPs Albana Vokshi and Rajmonda Bulku held shares in companies that had been awarded contracts.

The Socialist opposition accused the ruling parties of corruption and nepotism.

An investigation by the Tirana’s prosecutor’s office in December 2010 found no evidence of wrongdoing in Vokshi’s case. No investigation was launched in Bulku’s case. Both MPs have denied wrongdoing.

But the issue refused to go away, especially after a video emerged in January 2011 showing the head of the Socialist Movement for Integration, Ilir Meta, discussing a 700,000 euro bribe with the former minister of economy Dritan Prifti.

The General Prosecutor’s office then indicted Meta of corruption. The transcripts appeared to show Meta asking Prifti to swing a concession tender for a hydropower station in return for a bribe by the businessman concerned of 700,000 euro, or a 7 per cent stake in the project.

Meta denied wrongdoing and called the accusations politically motivated. Prosecutors sought a two-year prison sentence and a fine of a million lek (8,300 euro). However, the Supreme Court cleared Meta of the charges on January 16.

Investments on hold:

A recent study conducted by AEA says many of the problems in Albania’s energy sector originate in the tendering process for concessionary contracts.

The system of selecting winning bids from the contracting authority (METE) is based on a point system where the best project on paper is selected,” the AEA notes.

However, “[often] the project that emerges as the winner of the bidding process is unrealizable,” it adds. The AEA underlines that a good part of the projects did not give the companies enough time to apply for construction permits with the local authorities and many of these companies having been shunned by the banks when they applied for financing.

Berisha’s government claims that the construction of new hydropower stations will turn the country in a “regional energy superpower,” in July the Minister of Economy Nasip Naco, admitted mistakes have been made.

“We will not tolerate companies that have received a concession back in 2007 and have yet to register in the business register,” Naco said.

According to the Chair man of AEA, Eriat Shafe, the energy sector has been usurped by speculators and the government’s admission of problems only confirms this.

“For many of these concessions the [promised] investments are not being realized” Shafe said.

“The all translates into frozen investments, which do not get injected into the economy and as a result our national resources are held to ransom,” he added.

The investigation was supported by the Danish association of investigative journalism, FUJ, under its SCOOP programme.
Postmodern Theatre, Albanians and Serbs

While the political relationship between Serbs and Albanians may be in rough waters, a recent theatre production shows that artistic cooperation between the two groups is flourishing.

"Patriotic Hypermarket", a play performed this week at the Bitef Theatre, does just that. Actors from Belgrade, Pristina, Skopje and Tirana perform together in a postmodernist play which deals with their common schizophrenic reality - that alone makes it a great success.

When I first heard about the Patriotic Hypermarket show, I wondered how all the ideas would fit together - politics, postmodern theatre, Albanians and Serbs. Would the art falter under the weight of tragic everyday stories of people that went through the hell of war?

How would postmodernist theatre, which tends towards the ambiguous, incorporate the political component of the play?

Now I had the chance to see for myself.

What I found is a proper postmodernist play, almost made by the rulebook with sketches of characters deriving from a central theme: the relationship between Serbs and Albanians based on a recent shared history - Tomahawks, murders, rapes, prejudice, and mutual stereotypes.

Their relationship is interpreted through various stories that hang from the frame of the central idea, and each is presented as a completely new spectacle.

The actors perform the stories in a variety of ways - from simple confessions followed by rhythmical whispering to real-life situations, poetry recitals, music and dance.

"Patriotic Hypermarket" will again be performed in Belgrade at the beginning of March.

Wartime Photo Exhibit Opens in Sarajevo

An exhibition of some 30 black and white photos of the siege of Sarajevo contrasts the wartime atmosphere of the Bosnian capital with the face of the city today.

The play Hypermarket brings together Serb and Albanian actors.

The play Hypermarket brings together Serb and Albanian actors.

By Elvira Jukic

The exhibition of Bosnian photographer Dejan Vekic, called Like Sarajevo - 20 years later, shows a collection of photographs that documented everyday life in the city during the 1992-95 war in the country.

Most of the photos are unique, made in wartime conditions and most do not have a negative, the gallery curator explained during the opening of the exhibition last Friday night.

Vekic said that the photos and the accompanying video documentation, also shown at the exhibition, will later be part of a photography book he plans to publish: a "story" he has yet to finish.

"It was a challenge for me to make a slightly different document of the war than all the other photographers did at the time," Vekic told Pristina Insight.

The photographs, showing destroyed buildings and bullet-riddled walls, represent a stark contrast with the Sarajevo of today.

One Sarajevo resident who lived through the siege and attended the opening of the exhibition was Jovan Divjak, a former Bosnian Army general.

"What we saw here [at the exhibition] is something that does not exist anymore," Divjak said: "There is no longer anything in the city that shows what really happened in Sarajevo during the war."
Macedonian Artists Keep Silent Over Skopje 2014

While foreigners are often caustic in their appreciation of Skopje's controversial revamp, some comparing it to Disneyland, the local artistic community is keeping strangely quiet.

By Maja Nedelkovska

As the government-sponsored facelift of the Macedonian capital, dubbed Skopje 2014, gains new additions almost every month, it is drawing increasingly vocal criticism from the outside world.

Foreign experts often mock the revamp or compare it to Disneyland. Many question its architectural and aesthetic values and find its politically imposed obsessions with the artistic styles of Classical Antiquity anachronistic.

Back at home, however, artists, architects and city planners seem strangely reluctant to raise their voices.

One possible explanation for this critical silence is that many are engaged in projects connected to the costly makeover that pay their bills.

Architect Vangel Bozinovski, author of the “Memorial House of Mother Teresa,” one of the most controversial additions to Skopje 2014, insists there is no enforced culture of silence.

“Artists can freely say what they want about Skopje 2048,” he says. “Criticism also means affirmation.”

Bozinovski adds that the revamp, which incorporates dozens of new buildings as well as statues, fountains, bridges, a triumphal arch and an obelisk, is “carrying out the long-term desires of Macedonians,” and that “the people are loving it.”

Valentina Karanfilova Stevanovska, author of Skopje 2048’s most famous statue, the 20-metre-high equestrian statue of Alexander the Great, also rubbishes the idea that artists are afraid to speak out, suggesting that, like herself, many simply are not interested in politicalised debates.

“I am an artist and have never been interested in politics. I create art works and, as an artist, am totally incompetent to talk about politics,” she told Prishtina Insight.

“This project gave us a chance to show our qualities and we’re happy that our works will leave their marks on time,” she added.

Meanwhile artist Aleksandar Stankoski, who is well known for his criticisms of former Yugoslavia, and of Macedonia’s NATO and Europe aspirations, stands up for aspects of Skopje 2014.

“I am not part of the project but those that are, are recognized by the government as the best in their fields,” he said.

“It’s unprofessional to say that politics and their employment [prospects] are affecting artists,” Stankoski added.

He said it was wrong to connect the debate - or lack of it - over the aesthetics of the project to political influence and artists’ own circumstances.

“Art goes beyond political polarization; it is historical, not political. It is wrong to put it into a political mould,” he said.

Culture expert Robert Alagjozovski says many artists face a dilemma.

“On one hand their profession is finally getting its recognition and they’re earning big salaries, but on the other hand, their talent has to make compromises with kitschy political orders,” he said.

“Caught between the hammer and the anvil, they’d rather stay silent,” he added.

Alagjozovski explains that “artists are careful about the hand that feeds them. They don’t have any interest in criticism.”

Meanwhile he believes the government is becoming ever more authoritarian.

“For those willing to think in those norms it will go well,” he predicted. “For all the others who have their own focuses and concerns, it is going to be difficult.”

Not everyone is keeping silent however. Matej Bogdanovski is one of the few artists to have publicly opposed Skopje 2048.

He blames apathy and a weak tradition of politically engaged art in Macedonia for the fact, that as he sees it, most artists have succumbed to the influence of the ruling centre-right VMRO DPMNE party.

“In our tradition, engaged art barely exists. To create engaged art, you have to have strong artists, courage and creativity,” Bogdanovski said.

He believes the artistic community’s lack of initiative reflects a broader apathy in society as a whole.

Next stop, Impressionism:

Aleksandar Stankoski says the decision to opt for a Classical style came as a shock – but predicts that it won’t be the last surprise in the Skopje 2048 saga.

“Everybody was confused by what was going on: Classicism coming after Modernism! In art history, it is hardly possible, but we are doing it: a bourgeois version of Social Realism, with Art Deco touches!”

He predicts that official styles will change as the interest of Macedonia’s rulers jumps from one style towards others. “I believe that Impressionism is coming next,” Stankoski said.

“They are passive and can’t feel what is going on around them. It is as if the devastation of the city is not such a big deal for them. They see themselves as ‘only artists,’ he added.

Bogdanovski’s own collection “Skopje – rados ti ke bides!” (“Skopje you will shine with joy”) has won popularity among critics of the government project.

“When you see that the monster is too big, all you can do is scream, not because of fear but because you are angry,” said “Skopje-rados ti ke bides!” Bogdanovski added.

“But the wave has swept us over all and today we’re all swimming in a murky swamp full of Baroque facades, Antique columns, Classicism, warriors, horses, bronze, marble, a glorious past, an undesired future… while the world is laughing,” he continued.

An architect and Professor Miracajce Grece is another trenchant critic of Skopje 2048. His says most artists have kept quiet because the country is sliding into a kind of one-party dictatorship.

“The assumption that Macedonia is a democratic society is totally wrong. Our society is becoming a quiet and soft dictatorship,” he said. “Institutions are there only to execute one political will.”

Grece argues that not only artists but lawyers and judges, engineers, doctors, professors have also been silenced.

“They [the authorities] use the same techniques when they need to subdue people, corrupting those who have no moral problems and making them their servants.

“Then they destroy those that oppose them. They keep the majority in fear, with the threat: if you keep silent, you won’t be hurt,” he said.

“Only a few who remain unstauned raise their voice against this, while the majority is patient, and silently waits for better times,” he added. “This is natural behavior in a totalitarian social system!”

He fears that some foreign artists can see what is going on in Macedonia much more clearly than most people at home can do.

“Mario Botta, one of the greatest living architects, visited Skopje recently and told me, concerned and impressed, that the buildings in the city centre were ‘a sign that something terrible is happening in Macedonian society,” Grece recalled.

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 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.

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 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, Rt Ali Kelmendi, Sunny Hill, Prishtina
+381 38 225 226
www.hotelafa.com

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 wood-burn stove, are definitely genuine napoli. 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 49-42602

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

Churchill’s Pub

Churchill’s Pub is a place you can associate with its unique, casual, cozy and friendly atmosphere where you can enjoy an affordable pub style.... That comfortable atmosphere combined with that special music, the great range of drinks and the chance to get to play a game of pool and dart board on the second floor.

A pub where you can go and enjoy everynight live music, different ones like evergreen, tradicional, uplugged and rock. You can also enjoy the happy hour which starts at 20:00-21:00 everynight.

Beers (Peja and Skopje) for only 0,99 Euros, Gin Mix and Vodka Mix for only 1,50 Euros.

Churchill’s Pub is located in the heart of Prishtina.

Str: Johan V. Hahn, Payton, Prishtine
+377 44 728 750

Restorant Brasserie Lura

At 450square metres Restaurant Lura is as spacious as you get in Prishtina. It’s also surrounded by the towering trees of Germia and offers a pleasant garden where, in the summer, this eatery prepares food al fresco. It’s large meeting room is also ideal for that private lunch or dinner.

The combined style classical and modern interior leaves you with an impression of refined taste.

The newly opened restaurant is already famous for its Mediterranean specialties, exquisite seafood and fine selections of Italian, French and Local wines. But that’s not all, for music lovers, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday night dinners are accompanied by jazz, whereas on Saturdays local patriots can enjoy live traditional Albanian music.

Lura Restaurant
Str: Nazmi Gaffuri • 10 000 Prishtina • +381 (0)38 763 763; +386 (0)49 763 763 • www.lurarestaurant.com
info@lurarestaurant.com

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 steaks 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 Iliria Hotel
Prishtina: 045-409660
**Alvin and the Chipmunks**
*Every day at 5 pm*

Kino ABC screens the premiere of the movie “Alvin and the Chipmunks” by the director Tim Hill.

Three morally inclined chipmunks, Alvin, Simon and Theodore, find their tree cut down and sent to Los Angeles.

Once there, they meet the frustrated songwriter David Seville, and despite a poor, house-wrecking first impression, they impress him with their singing talent.

Seeing the opportunity for success, both man and chipmunks make a pact for them to sing his songs.

But success presents its own trials and tribulations as their unscrupulous record executive, Ian Hawke, plans to break up this family to exploit the boys.

Can Dave and the Chipmunks discover what they really value amid the superficial glamour around them?

By Donjeta Demolli

**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo**
*Every day at 10 pm*

The director of the movie is David Fugit. Cast includes Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson, Colin Ford, Thomas Haden Church, Patrick Fugit. This English-language adaptation of the Swedish novel by Stieg Larsson follows a discredited journalist, Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig), as he investigates the disappearance of a wealthy patriarch’s niece from 40 years ago.

He is aided by the pierced, tattooed, punk computer hacker named Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara).

As they work together in the investigation, Blomkvist and Salander uncover immense corruption and murder.

The movie is Mike Mitchell.

For more information call +381 (0) 38 552 555 or write oda@teatrioda.com.

**Timeout**

**Oda Theatre**

Every Tuesday at 8pm

**Tre Gjermanët e Trashë II**
*(Three Fat Germans II)*

Thanks to this play you will understand “What did Brigel say when he asked for a drink?”; “Why Hans didn’t let him drink Mijilo?”; “How did Gani experience his 21st snow?”; “Is Vukashin really Uxshin?”; “Does KFORja still work for KFOR or she just loves him?”; “How did Hekuran boil eggs in the middle of the North Pole?”; These and other events you can see in the play “Tre Gjermanët e Trashë II”.

**Author:** Lirak Celaj; **Producer:** Florent Mehmeti; **Roles:** Naser Rafuna, Adrian Morina, Kushtrim Sheremeti, Lirak Celaj, Fisnik Ademi, Ard Islami, Arta Selimi, Florent Mehmeti.

For more information call +381 (0) 246 555 or write oda@teatrioda.com.

**Dodona Theatre**

Every Thursday 7.30pm

**Çifti I Hapir**

Alpin Zhumadilari is being staged with the text of Italian authors Dario Fo and Franca Rame, directed by Kushtrim Koliqi

A man proposes to his wife of eliminating the concept of martial loyalty and creating an “open relationship” in their lives. The woman rejects this and after several attempts of suicide, she decides to accept her husband’s offer because in fact it’s the only way to remain married. The man is happy. He, no longer needs to hide his girlfriends and is released from feelings of guilt. Now everything is democratic and open. Everything goes well until the day when the woman finds the love of her life, which is what her “modern” husband cannot accept.

**Cast:** Edona Reshitaj and Besart Sillamiku; Costumes and the setting: Njomza Luci; **Composer:** Bruno Saqipi; Light; **Designer:** Skender Latifi; Stage manager: Bedri Maleku, Albert Bekteshi and Fadil Gashi, **Photographer:** Arton Humolli.

**Stacion Cca Prishtina**

Every Friday 7.30pm

**We Bought a Zoo**
*Every day at 5 pm and 7.30 pm*

The director of the movie is Mike Mitchell. Cast includes Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson, Colin Ford, Thomas Haden Church, Patrick Fugit.

Facing his son’s expulsion from school, recent widower, Benjamin Mee decides to begin a new life. To escape the sad reminders of his deceased wife, he buys a large house with a zoo in the backyard. Although reluctant to take on the zoo with all its animals - he decides to give it a try. His daughter, 13-year-old Rosie is happy with the decision, while his 14-year-old son Dylan unhappily retreats into his art work. Benjamin meets the zoo staff, led by head zookeeper Kelly, and they begin their work to have the zoo up and running by summer. Meanwhile, Dylan and Kelly’s 13-year-old cousin Lily begin a friendship, although Dylan is shy and uneasy initially.

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

**PRISHTINA DIARY**

**Friday, February 02, 2012**

Peppermint Club, 9pm

MC Kresha & Ghetto

For more information call at +381 (0) 38 552 555

Te Veni, 9pm

Pentagrami & Ana

For reservation call +377 (0) 45 361 210

Hamam | jazz Bar, 9pm

Crossroad Blues Band

For reservation call +377 (0) 44 222 289

**Friday, February 04, 2012**

Peppermint Club, 9pm

Hip Hop & R’n’B

For more information call at +381 (0) 38 552 555

Hamam | jazz Bar, 9pm

Zig Zag Orchestra

For reservation call +377 (0) 44 222 289

Te Veni, 9pm

Ylka Kuqi & Visar Kuqi

For reservation call +377 (0) 45 361 210

**Friday, February 04, 2012**

Hamam | jazz Bar

Georgi Sareski quartet, 9pm

For reservation call +377 (0) 44 222 289
Arm and Leg Buy a Delicious, Awkward Meal Chez Pacolli

It wasn’t a good sign that the only other diners at Iliria Restaurant on a Friday night were seated with Behgjet Pacolli. The deputy prime minister and construction mogul, who’s purportedly the world’s richest Albanian, seemed right at home at what just might be the priciest restaurant in Prishtina.

The vast, nearly empty dining room Pacalli’s newly opened Swiss Diamond Hotel was sea of chandeliers, fine china and mirrors. It felt like a throwback to fine continental European dining circa 1979, suitable for Tito himself. If I hadn’t known better, I might have even mistaken Pacolli for the well-tanned ghost of the late Yugoslav emperor.

The wait staff appeared a bit caught off guard by our arrival. A team of three oversaw my fellow diner and me. Our waiter couldn’t have been more than 15 years old; he was in turn supervised by an adult waiter who was in turn under the charge of a maître d’.

As we awaited our orders, the waiters brought us each an amuse bouche of fresh mozzarella and tomato slices located near a trite phenomenon known as the balsamic reduction squiggle. We devoured with pleasure. The appetizer’s arrival proved to be a pleasant surprise. A sophisticated interpretation of the standard lot and peshrut plate, the dried beef strips formed a short pyramid around a collection of grilled vegetables. Wedges of goat cheese drizzled with olive dotted the perimeter. Both the cheese and preparation of meat and fish dominated the main-course offerings, many of which exceeded 20 euro. I elected to take the trout while my fellow diner went for the salmon fillet, which also represented the least expensive options on the menu at 12 and 11 euro respectively.

We opted to share the appetizer’s name Restaurant Illyria would imply. The food offerings lived up to the antiquated continental European decor. A largely generic array of starters, pastas and mains that showed little Albanian influence that the name Restaurant Illyria would imply. The most interesting and locally sourced appetizer, dried beef with goat cheese for 8 euro. Various unforgettable-sounding preparations of meat and fish often lacking in the standard overly salty fare.

The salmon and trout arrived on plates concealed by silver domes, in another throwback to the stuff continental cuisine of yesteryear. Once the waiters removed to reveal the fish slightly rare as it should be. In something I’ve never seen trout or any fish in Kosovo, the filets were seared on the skin side, for just long enough to leave the crispy outside and the fish slightly rare as it should be. In other words, perfect. The kitchen handled the fish with similar care, opting for the slight rareness instead of overcooking the fish as most restaurants do.

Afterward, we didn’t have the motivation to attempt dessert and its 8 euro entry fee. With a relatively Spartan meal at more than 60 euro with tip, price really gets to the heart of the problem at Iliria. If the menu was about a third less expensive and the surroundings leaned more toward understated sophistication, Iliria could easily be the best restaurant in town. Perhaps target is the dignitaries he hopes will frequent the hotel and perhaps never leave it.

International School Unveils New Home

The International Learning Group School, ILG, officially opened its new home in Veternik last week. ILG is an international school providing English language instruction for children from ages two to ten. Currently the school has children from 25 different countries, and teachers from USA and Europe.

The school was established 7 years ago in Prishtina and recently moved from its former location near Gërmeni. ILG is a non-profit school, and is registered with both the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the NGO office in Kosovo.
Kosovo received its biggest snow fall in nearly three decades last week, carpeting the country with up to 2.5 metres. Temperatures fell to -22°C as most of Eastern Europe suffered a deadly cold snap and more snow is predicted for the coming days.

According to Syla Tahirsylaj, Director of the Hydrometeorology Centre, this winter has been mild compared to that of 1984, when the whole country was blocked. And while pedestrians in Prishtina may be cursing the snow-cone-ice, for skiers and farmers, the snowfall is good news he says.

“The snow has created perfect condition for skiers and it will enrich the lakes in Kosovo increasing the level of water. "Also, another important aspect is the agricultural aspect as the snow will protect the winter seeds in plants.”

Prishtina Insight has selected some of the best of your snowy photos.

1. What surprised you most about Prishtina?
The building boom never stops.

2. What’s your favorite hangout?
The office at BSF with our ethnically diverse, young and enthusiastic team that functions so well together.

3. Do you do anything cultural?
Some Red Hall concerts, Hamam occasionally, dream about museums.

4. What is the most annoying thing about Prishtina?
Cars on the sidewalks - people in the streets.

5. If you were mayor of Prishtina for the day what would you change?
With dictatorial powers?
Mandate a Prishtina Parking Authority to build multi-floor parking garages on the edges of Prishtina and a day tax for non-residents driving into Prishtina.

6. How many macchiatos do you drink a day?
Who’s counting?

7. What’s the tastiest Kosovar food?
Anything from Lumi.

8. What landmark do you use to tell taxi drivers where you live?
Police headquarters. No, really.
Christopher Dell: “A picture! Somebody! Truly an honor to get a compliment like that... I am truly Highness. Thank you, Boss. It is such an honor, especially when you are willing to support them.”

Kosovo had to become a Frankenstein country, combining all, why should you care about our kind if he doesn’t lose sleep at night due to a troubled conscience? I truly hope this clarification will finally confirm the claim. It, however, might be more difficult for Kosovo to become the victimizers themselves. If you don’t agree on that.

Christopher Dell - Dear Ambassador Christopher Dell, I must remind you, since you seem to have lost it in translation, that I’ve been repeatedly saying that it has a problem with the Serbian state and its government, not the Serbian people, which is of fundamental difference. As you know, I am not Albanian, not Serb - a fundamental difference. Otherwise, I would never have been able to indulge in the menacing snowy photos of Pristina emerging on Facebook. Judging from the photos and the claims of people in Pristina, it appears that this was possibly one of the heaviest snowfalls the capital has seen in a long while.

The UK Health and Safety Act is seen by the inhabitants of the Sceptile island as a nemesis to tradition, common sense and old-fashioned culture.

School sports’ days are cancelled, homeworkers are banned from clearing the pavement outside their front door of school, traditional games as rolling big bits of cheese down a hill are outlawed - all because of fears that it could breach the above-menioned safety clauses.

If you were to fail to believe this then the experiment of bringing a health and safety officer to Kosovo would confirm the claim. It, however, might be more difficult for Kosovo to become the victimizers themselves. If you don’t agree on that.

Kosovo, with its electricity wire festooned streets and potholed boulevards, is the mirror image of the United Kingdom’s “Health and Safety” state.

The UK Health and Safety Act is seen by the inhabitants of the Sceptile island as a nemesis to tradition, common sense and old-fashioned culture.

School sports’ days are cancelled, homeworkers are banned from clearing the pavement outside their front door of school, traditional games as rolling big bits of cheese down a hill are outlawed - all because of fears that it could breach the above-menioned safety clauses.

If you were to fail to believe this then the experiment of bringing a health and safety officer to Kosovo would confirm the claim. It, however, might be more difficult for Kosovo to become the victimizers themselves. If you don’t agree on that.
Lustration Should Not be About Purges

The lustration process in Macedonia is one of several in the region that have gone horribly wrong - becoming a tool by which the authorities stigmatisate their enemies.

20 years after the fall of the Communist regime, the archives are still open, victims can still access their files, perpetrators can still be prosecuted, and informers can lose their public jobs.

Public is the key word here. Public function is the only and only field of interest to the state in this respect. Whether a private company or organisation employs a former member of the Stasi or an informant is a private matter for them.

It might be slightly disgusting, but who would expect private matters always to be moral, and ethical? Or rather, who would assume the right to be the judge of that?

A different example is Romania, where my parents’ victim files are hosted, as are those of some good friends, former dissidents. These files are incomplete and erratic. And this won’t change. Why? Because they were under control of the perpetrators of the crimes for more than a decade after the regime imploded. They have been manipulated, tampered with, and destroyed in such a manner that proper reconstruction of events is an enorously complex puzzle.

A third example is Macedonia. Here, the process started two decades late and is flawed in almost every respect. Like so many other issues in Macedonia today, the process of lustration is subject to political warfare.

Instead of instigating a public debate on the role of the self-styled elites in the former Yugoslavia and discussing the collaboration of broad sectors of the population with a system that oppressed other parts, the whole matter is limited to the exposure of alleged informants.

I will omit the details about how the commission in charge of the process is anything but independent, and how the political elites created yet another partisan institution that they can misuse in public, according to their needs. I am talking about the political elites, plural, because both today’s government and the opposition have participated in creating the mess. And they have done so on purpose, for the purpose of control, to have ammunition in the fight against the political enemy.

The problem is that the “other” is perceived the enemy, not an opponent. It is the personalisation of politics in common in this part of the world, which holds the entire society hostage to the ego of a few. The lustration process is victim of the same reflexes.

Why else would there have been a political decision to extend the lustration process both in terms of the timeframe and in terms of the persons to be covered?

To explain to those who haven’t followed the issue: the law as it is also covers the 1990s, a decade of democracy - however transitional and imperfect, but still a democratic decade.

One eyebrow goes up. Secondly, the law now seeks lustration of civil society representatives and journalists. Second eyebrow goes up, and the signal switches to alert.

Powerful opponents of the authorities in civil society and media have been stigmatised as traitors for years now. The lustration process, as it looks now, is an attempt to award this process of stigmatisation the equivalent of a diploma, a piece of paper that cannot be denied, refuted and forgotten.

Whatever the circumstances, damnation is ongoing. Lustration is about the past, it is not to be confused with purges.

The decision by Macedonia’s constitutional court to suspend 22 provisions of the lustration law is to be commended. Hopefully it will help bring the process of lustration back to where it belongs: uncovering the crimes of the past.

Hopefully also it will send a clear signal to the political elites to continue their fight in the arena where it is supposed to take place in the political arena of the present, in the institutions and not in the murky corridors of defunct secret services.

Kosovo has received the list of conditions to be fulfilled for visa liberalisation

Kosovans pranoi listën më kushtet që duhet plotësuar për liberalizimin e vizave!

February 3 - 16, 2012

If you would like your NGO to appear in our Making a Difference feature, please email info@pristhinainsight.com

Cover-Up of Protestor Deaths 'Blow to Albania’s Reputation'

Gabriel Partos, an analyst with the Economist Intelligence Unit, tells Balkan Insight that allegations of a high-level conspiracy to cover-up the murder of protestors during the January 21 riots is another blow to Albania’s already tarnished reputation.

Q: What picture of Albanian democracy and rule of law emerges from the arrest warrants issued for the murder of protestors and conspiracy to conceal evidence during the January 21, 2011 riots?

A: It might be slightly disgusting, but if they allege a high-level conspiracy within government circles to cover-up what appears to have been criminal activity, the charges represent a further blow to Albania’s reputation for upholding the rule of law. It’s a reputation that has already been seriously dented in recent years by the disputes over the results of the 2009 parliamentary elections and the 2011 mayoral elections in Tirana, the killings of the four demonstrators and by the failure of the legal system to produce any convictions of prominent figures who’ve been charged with corruption.

Q: Prime Minister Sali Berisha considers the January 21 demonstration to be a coup d’etat orchestrated by the general prosecutor, the president, the secret service head and the opposition. He recently threatened to arrest the general prosecutor and the president when they leave office. Should the EU tolerate this sort of behavior from an aspiring candidate state or speak out forcefully against it?

A: Threats to arrest senior officials involved in law enforcement or the judiciary would appear to be a serious interference with justice. It’s incompatible with the separation of power between the executive and the judiciary, which is a cornerstone of democracy.

The EU tends to choose its words carefully, and it rarely speaks about forcefully, unless it’s dealing with major threats to international peace or large-scale repression by dictatorial regimes. With an aspiring member such as Albania it has different, constructive relations. But its views in relation to Albania are very clear, and Albania’s failure for two years in a row to secure the status of a candidate for EU membership is evidence of the EU’s standpoint on this issue.

Q: What impact will the attacks from Prime Minister Sali Berisha against the general prosecutor and the president have on Albania’s EU bid?

A: Albania has no chance of securing EU candidate status until it changes direction. That requires, among other things, the resurrection of a constructive dialogue between the government and the opposition, an end to political interference with the judiciary and a genuine attempt to tackle corruption.

The conditions are not too onerous – after all, Montenegro, which started its EU integration process much later than Albania, has already secured candidate status, and is expected to open EU accession talks in June. Incidentally, the decline in democratic standards in Albania has been highlighted by various international surveys, including the EIU’s recently published 2011 Democracy Index, which has tracked Albania’s slide to 82nd position (out of 167 countries) from 84th place in 2010 and 81st in 2006.
Ecosovo

The Makiato that Makes a Difference

By Elizabeth Gowing

The ethical consumer movement is based on the belief that it matters where you spend your money. One shopper’s choice of local honey, one passenger’s decision to use the bus, one household’s attempts to reduce their energy consumption...each of these small actions can make a difference. So then, where should you drink your makiato?

I have a suggestion if you want to take your custom somewhere where it can make a difference. X21 is a cozy café, centrally located, with good prices. But despite their friendly welcome, the staff who take your order, make your coffee, and manage the café’s stock are young men who might find it difficult to find work elsewhere, because all of them live with Down’s Syndrome.

Talking to Leonora Bajraktari and her husband, Driton who founded Down Syndrome Kosovo, and the X21 café, you realize the challenges of living with Down’s Syndrome in Kosovo, where general awareness about the condition is low, and misinformation and stereotypes are widespread.

“We want to show that people with Down’s Syndrome can be part of society, can work, and can live lives that are useful to themselves and to their families,” says Driton. His daughter, Mjalta, was born with Down’s Syndrome during the war. His wife Leonora talks about huddling in Pristina post-war internet cafes trying to download information in English to explain what the diagnosis meant for her child. She’s a beautiful and determined-looking woman, but when she talks about those days she looks tired.

“There was no information available in Albanian, and no support for me as a mother,” Leonora and Driton set out to change that. Leonora asked the hospital to pass her number on to any mother of a child diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome. They founded their NGO in 2007 and started the X21 café (named for the extra 21st chromosome which causes Down’s Syndrome) in 2008. Since then their organization has worked with around 600 children and adults living with Down’s Syndrome and provided critical support for their families, and thousands of training days for medical and educational staff who can support families with accurate information and appropriate support. In Pristina, Ferizaj, Prizren, Mitrovica and Gjirokastër, they now have centres which are staffed by professional therapists along with students in psychology and education who work as volunteers. They have worked to get 52 children with Down’s Syndrome, including Mjalta, registered in mainstream schools.

It’s inspiring stuff, but Besnik who serves me my tea, doesn’t present himself as a trailblazer, though what he is doing (as well as helping to warm me up on this snowy day) is an innovation in Kosovo. He is one of five waiters aged 18-36 employed in the X21 café. ‘I like coming here. Why would I hang out at home? There’s nothing to do there. Here I see my friends,’ he shrugs, before moving on to clear away a used mug from the adjoining table.

The money raised by the X21 café funds life-changing support for the families with whom Down Syndrome Kosovo is currently working, as well as for reaching out to new families. Twenty six children were born with Down’s Syndrome last year in Kosovo, and unlike Mjalta, these children have the chance for organized support from the very beginning. Driton and Leonora and their colleagues are determined to reach all these families, whether they live in villages (where Leonora tells me many children with Down’s Syndrome are still hidden away by their families) or cities, north or south of the Ibar, and whatever language they speak. Down’s Syndrome is an issue for every group in Kosovo and we can all help one another.”

That includes you. Go on, have a makiato, and have it at café X21.

X21 is located behind the main PTK building in Dardania. From the Gazette Express office, continue to the Furra Elsa bakery and turn left behind the bakery. Turning right off this colonnade is a row of businesses including the X21 café.

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

US Says Vibrant Civil Society Key to Sexual Equality in Kosovo

By Shengjyl Osmani

Daniel Baer, the US’s Deputy Assistant Secretary, told journalists this week that a “free and vibrant civil society” was crucial to promoting sexual equality.

He made the remarks during a live video conference with journalists in Kosovo, and a number of other countries, to discuss US’s foreign policy toward acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, LGBT, communities.

“What we see both in the American context and in many places around the world is that – and one of the things that Secretary Clinton has made a hallmark of her administration is that having a, a civil society that is allowed to organize citizens around issues, that is allowed to appeal to the government to do better, that is allowed to engage with government and make recommendations about how government can better serve citizens – that that’s really crucial,” he said.

“We engage diplomatically with partners around the world, in both places where this is a more difficult conversation and places where we’re working with other governments who want to collaborate with us and help to secure rights for everybody around the world. So we have a range of conversations ongoing with other governments at the government-to-government level.”

On the issue of dealing with LGBT issues in conservative countries such as Kosovo, Baer said that a conversation about the issue, rather than lecturing, was necessary. “What we’ve found and what many others have found around the world who have been working within their own societies to advocate for tolerance, to advocate for treating everyone equally, is that in many, many places, it requires an ongoing and a long-term conversation,” he said.

“And one of the things that I most appreciate about Secretary Clinton’s speech last month was that it really was overall an invitation to a conversation. It was not a lecture. It was an invitation to work through a set of questions that people have.”

“And the invitation was put out there understanding that, for many people, this is a difficult issue to think through and work through. But it was put out there at the same time with the very clear conviction that all people are people and that being gay doesn’t make you less human and doesn’t make you less entitled to human rights. And so working through these questions is an ongoing process.”

The US Embassy in Pristina organised the round table debate with journalists from Kosovo daily’s this week, allowing them to follow the live the conference from the White House.
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Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 249 284

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Greek
Address: "Ismail Qemajli" no. 68
Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 243 013

German
Address: "Azem Jashanica" no. 17
Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 244 925

Italian
Address: "Azem Jashanica" no. 5
Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
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Japanese
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Phone: +381 (0) 38 249 995

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Address: "Mesud Krasniqi" no. 34
Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
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Malaysian
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10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 243 467

Norwegian
Address: "Sejdi Kryeziu" no. 6
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Phone: +381 (0) 38 232 111 00

Saudi Arabian
Address: Dardania SU 7, building 2, #1
30000 Prishtina
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Slovenian
Address: "Anton Ceta" no. 6
30000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 244 886

Swedish
Address: "Azem Jashanica" no. 5
Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 248 088

Swiss
Address: "Adrian Krasniqi" no. 11
10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 248 088

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Address: "Ismail Qemajli" no. 59
Arbëria / Dragodan, 10000 Prishtina
Phone: +381 (0) 38 226 044