

Prishtina Insight

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Macedonia Steps Back from the Brink

Fears of a recrudescence of large-scale ethnic conflict are receding in Macedonia after police said the number of violent ethnic-related incidents had dropped in the last 48 hours.

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High-level KEK Corruption Probe 'Vanishes'

Evidence of high-level corruption at Kosovo's energy firm appears to have been ignored while its alleged perpetrators still hold posts as state employees, an investigation by Prishtina Insight can reveal.

By Petrit Collaku

The EU's Anti-Fraud Office, OLAF, discovered in 2008 that contracts between Kosovo's public energy provider, KEK, and a firm connected with one of its senior officials, Fadil Ismajli, were awarded without "fair competition" and in suspicious circumstances.

The investigators also accused Ismajli of direct conflicts of interest. He was co-owner and general director of Komtel until 1999 before joining KEK, where he is alleged to have been involved in awarding a number of tenders to his former firm.

A team of investigators from the

European Anti-Fraud Office, the United Nations Internal Oversight Service Office in Vienna and the Italian Guardia Di Finanza, recommended in a letter sent to the UNMIK chief, Joachim Ruecker, in 2008 that further investigations should be conducted and that the records should be forwarded to KEK so that disciplinary measures would be initiated against Ismajli.

"In view of the evidence obtained it has been determined that there has been no fair competition in the procurement processes involving Komtel and KEK," the report reads. The evidence "directly implicates" Ismajli, it adds.

However, the case appears to have gone cold. UNMIK's

spokesperson is unable to confirm whether the recommendations were followed or whether the file was handed to prosecutors. The EU rule of law mission, EULEX, which inherited all UNMIK cases at the end 2008, says it has received no information from UNMIK on this matter, while KEK knows nothing of the investigation.

A well placed KEK source, meanwhile, has suggested that the case was "silenced" in the organisation, without elaborating further.

A few months after the report was sent to the UNMIK special representative, the suspected company, Komtel, was awarded a contract for 8 million euro by KOSTT, the public authority responsible

for electricity transmission. By that point Ismajli had transferred from KEK and become managing director of KOSTT.

Under the management of Vegim Gashi, a former AKR candidate for the post of Prishtina Mayor in 2009, Komtel has since been awarded a number of public tenders, including for KEK, Prishtina International Airport and the Constitutional Court.

Despite investigators' suggestions that disciplinary measures be taken against Ismajli, he has remained head of KOSTT, which pays him a salary of 42,000 euro annually.

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Kosovo Fritters Away Shrinking Science Budget

"As education minister it is a distinct honour to testify before you on the commitment of the government of Kosovo to science and research." So said Enver Hoxhaj in 2010 while launching Kosovo's National Research Programme, a five-year-plan aimed at spearheading scientific progress in the country..

news

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Former Minister Queries Kosovo Power Station Plan

Five days after the winning bid is announced to build Kosovo's new lignite-fired power plant, Kosovo e Re, its current station, Kosovo B, will be handed over to the private investor. For the next six years all profits will be collected by the winner as compensation for its capital investment..

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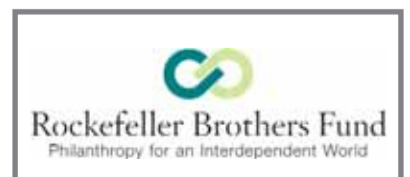
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High-level Corruption Probe at KEK "Vanishes"

from page 1

According to his Asset Disclosure submitted to the Anti-Corruption Agency, he has also accrued considerable wealth through his business and public duties, including more than 100,000 euro kept in deposits in Kosovo banks, four flats and two cars.

Ismajli has denied any wrongdoing, saying that the allegations were aimed solely at damaging his reputation.

Disappearing Investigation:

According to the investigators' letter, obtained by Prishtina Insight, their report was submitted on June 6, 2008 to two former heads of the UN Mission in Kosovo, its chief, Joachim Ruecker, and his deputy, Larry Rossin.

Investigations looked at a tender for the supply of software and hardware for KEK computers in 2001 valued at 2.8 million euro. Investigators also revealed that in 2001 and 2003 Komtel was awarded other contracts to develop and implement the "Central Accounting System" and the "Customer Care Package", valued at 450,000 euro, for KEK.

In 2006, the company was awarded the contract to supply municipalities with IT equipment for 149,150 euro and border police with equipment for 1.2 million euro, all of which were funded by the European Agency for Reconstruction.

UNMIK's spokesman, Olivier Salgado, was unable to explain to Prishtina Insight what had happened to the case. He said they had handed over all cases under their supervision to EULEX, which was deployed in Kosovo after it declared independence in February 2008. Files were then transferred to the EU mission.

EULEX, however, says it had received no such case from UNMIK. "The mission's prosecutors say they have never received this case or heard anything about it," Blerim Krasniqi, EULEX spokesperson, said.

When Prishtina Insight asked UNMIK to clarify, it was unable to confirm whether the case had been concluded before its handover to EULEX.

"If the investigation concluded that a criminal offence occurred, the case would have been submit-

ted to the [UNMIK] prosecutor's office, which would have had to decide to pursue criminal charges and, if so, it would have handed the cases to EULEX prosecutors at the end of 2008.

"If not, the prosecutor would have closed the case due to lack of substantive evidence," spokesperson Salgado said.

Similarly, KEK, said it had no record of the case. Spokesman Viktor Buzhala said the company was not aware of any report on investigations into tenders awarded to Komtel.

He said KEK neither received nor inherited from former management any requests submitted by OLAF or any other local or international institution pertaining to Komtel.

"If KEK had received any request related to tender irregularities, it would have immediately undertaken measures to place the said company on the black list, deeming it unable to compete for tenders or partake in other processes," Buzhala said.

However, a source familiar with KEK's bidding processes said there was pressure not to pursue the charges against Ismajli.

"Komtel is connected with powerful individuals in Kosovo, so there was great pressure to silence this case, regardless of the strong facts found and documented by OLAF," a senior KEK official said.

Nonexistent company won tender:

The investigators' report raises suspicions about the role of Ismajli in a number of tenders awarded by KEK to Komtel Project Engineering and funded by European Agency for Reconstruction.

The investigators collected documents from the KEK, the European Agency for Reconstruction, EAR, the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, the Central Fiscal Authority and the Kosovo Business Registration Agency, ARBK, including external audit reports on this issue.

The first tender related to KEK's Central Accounting System and was awarded to Datkom on May 2, 2001 and valued at 2.8 million euro.

According to this report, the following companies submitted bids: Ingra Co., DTT, Elasag and Datamat S.p.A.

According to the offer provided, Datamat and Komtel had established a joint venture called Datkom. But Datkom was not mentioned in the "Technical and Financial Evaluation" conducted by KEK in February 2001. The bid submission report listed no entry for Datamat, only for Komtel.

The winning bidder was announced as Datamat, an Italian company with a bank insurance bond issued by San Paolo IMI S.p.A Bank in Rome. There is no suggestion of wrongdoing on behalf of Datamat.

"The members of the panel for the a/m tender involved in that evaluation process obviously did not know which company in the end is the candidate of the said procedure," according to the report.

"The evaluation board evaluated a wrong company and awarded the contract to the non-existing company, 'Datacom'. At least the contract was signed between EAR and Datamat S.p.A. for and on behalf of the contractor Datkom."

Komtel ex-director voted on Komtel contract:

According to investigators, Ismajli was on the board that evaluated the tender, having signed an impartiality and confidentiality agreement in which he stated that he held no connection to "the bidders, individuals implicated therein or their sub-contractors".

When investigators interviewed Ismajli in October 2007 he confirmed his past experience with Komtel, stating he was a business partner of the company, and that he had informed KEK's executive board of this.

The report notes that he had served as the general director and was a co-founder of this company, established in 1994.

"It is clear that Komtel, which was only a small company with seven employees and obviously not in the situation to undertake extensive IT supplies, was put in front of the contractor Datamat," the report reads.

"It was suspected that the IT procurement procedures within KEK had been overruled in order to favour Komtel."

Investigators also found that a previous audit by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, PWC, uncovered similar issues.

"In the course of the [PWC] investigation on this transaction, they also became aware of another IT supplier selection process for the purchase of a computer and telephone system, which resulted in Komtel being chosen to install the system."

The final report by PWC, according to investigators, also contained "allegations against Fadil Ismajli as responsible KEK manager for energy trades being involved in several dubious contracts for import and export of electricity".



Fadil Ismajli's Wealth

With 100,000 euro cash deposited in Kosovo banks, two cars - a Jeep and Mercedes - four flats and a plot of land in Croatia, Ismajli is wealthy by the standards of Kosovo.

In his Asset Disclosure form submitted to the Anti-Corruption Agency, ACA, in 2011, Ismajli declared he owns 1,470 square meters of land valued at 125,000 euro. He also owns two 68 square metre and two 28 square metre apartments in Prishtina, with a total value of 200,000 euro.

He also declared ownership of

a Nissan SUV and a Mercedes, valued at 30,000 euro in total, and gold and silver jewelry worth 6,500 euro.

Ismajli also owns shares in two firms - 20 per cent of shares in Archlighting and 2.7 per cent of shares in IGI Prishtine.

The KOSTT Chief Executive Officer stated that he has 100,500 euro deposited in ProCredit Bank, Banka Ekonomike, Raiffeisen Bank and NLB.

His annual income is around 70,000 euro, including 42,000 euro from KOSTT, and dividends from Archlighting and rent from a leased apartment.

"Unfounded accusations":

Ismajli denies the allegations against him, maintaining that they are aimed at discrediting him.

"There is no truth in these allegations. I had no influence on those tenders," he said.

He confirmed he had been interviewed in 2007 regarding these issues, and said he had provided them with adequate explanations.

Ismajli said the decisions on bid awards were taken by internationals - UNMIK and EAR representatives.

He added that his position in KEK and his friendship with Vegim Gashi, his former business partner, could not have influenced the award of contracts to Komtel. "Kosovo is small. We have friends all over the place," Ismajli said.

The director of Komtel, Vegim Gashi, said he was not aware of the investigation or of the report issued in June 2008. Gashi denied that awards of KEK tenders to Komtel were made illegally.

Komtel still thrives:

Komtel Project Engineering has been awarded a number of tenders since the issue of the investigation report in June 2008.

These include a contract with Prishtina International Airport worth 70,000 euro for the "Supply of Microsoft Licences" in October 2010.

For KEK, it was awarded a contract for "Supply of multifunctional metering groups", valued at 231,000 euro in June 2011.

The company also won a tender at the Constitutional Court for "Supply and installation of IT equipment for the second phase of digitalization", valued at 40,000 euro, in July 2011.

Owner Gashi says that as it was not under official investigation there was no reason why it was not eligible for the contracts.

In November 2008, in a consortium with French firm Alstom (former Areva), Komtel won the first part of a capital project with KOSTT for the installation of equipment valued at over 8 million euro.

Ismajli, now KOSTT's chief executive, again said he had no influence in the award of this tender, and sees no legal violation in Komtel's participation in this tender, regardless of the investigative report issued in June 2008.

"Not only Komtel, but all companies awarded contracts by KOSTT, are subjected to a thorough selection process, weighed according to the Law on Public Procurement in Kosovo and rather strict selection rules," Ismajli said. "The selection was entirely merit-based."

KEK's spokesperson, Viktor Buzhala, said that Komtel was never on this enterprise's blacklist and that as a result it had been forced to declare the winning bidders in accordance with the law.



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Serbia "Playing Kosovo Card for Electoral Reasons"

While Serbia says it is extending local elections to Kosovo out of respect for its constitution, electoral considerations are shaping the policy.



By Bojana Barlovac and
Fatmir Aliu

A degree of bluff and exaggeration hangs over Serbia's announcement that local elections on May 6 will be extended to parts of Kosovo.

While the speaker of parliament, Slavica Djukic Dejanovic, on Tuesday said Belgrade would go ahead with the controversial move because "We have an obligation to respect the Serbian Constitution and Resolution 1244", in reality only a couple of municipalities in northern Kosovo are likely to be affected.

UN Resolution 1244, adopted in 1999, which authorised the deployment of UN peacekeepers in Kosovo, does not authorise Serbia to hold elections in Kosovo.

Serbia's 2006 Constitution, on the other hand, clearly defines Kosovo as a province of Serbia. According to article 182, Serbia has two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija.

Meanwhile the Kosovo government has vigorously contested the idea of Serbia holding elections anywhere on Kosovo territory - and is likely to be supported by significant international factors.

While Kosovo Serbs hope Belgrade will stick to its guns, some observers believe the embattled Serbian government, facing a tough election in spring, is playing pre-election games.

Speaker Djukic Dejanovic has in fact left open some doors to compromise, saying that Serbia "in cooperation with UNMIK will take all necessary actions in connection with elections in the autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohija."

This appears to throw part-responsibility for the final go-ahead for elections on the UN authority in Kosovo, UNMIK.

But UNMIK says it is no longer in charge of elections in Kosovo - and the Serbian authorities have not contact them on the issue.

"We have not been contacted by Serbia, so we're withholding comments until consultations with Serbia and other stakeholders have been carried out," UNMIK spokesperson Olivier Salgado told Prishtina Insight on Wednesday.

UNMIK says it has transferred most

of its former competences, including over elections, to independent Kosovo.

"The previous authority [on elections] was UNMIK, but this has been passed on to the provisional institutions that then evolved into Kosovo's independent institutions," Alexander Borg Olivier, former head of UNMIK's Pillar I department, on justice and police matters, who has also advised Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, told Prishtina Insight.

"I can't see how UNMIK can say that Serbia's elections in Kosovo are legitimate. UNMIK will say, as it said before, that such elections are invalid and illegal," he added.

The Kosovo government in the meantime has upped the ante, denouncing Belgrade's move as an illegal, illegitimate provocation.

Serbia is provoking open conflict with Kosovo and the entire region of the Western Balkans may pay the price, Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci declared on Wednesday.

"This is an attempt at aggression against the independent state of Kosovo," he added.

Thaci said his government would "use all our constitutional and legal force to prevent such elections from being held on our territory".

Belgrade has organised parliamentary and local elections in Serb-majority areas in post-conflict Kosovo before, in 2008.

Belgrade has organised parliamentary and local elections in Serb-majority areas in post-conflict Kosovo before, beginning in 2008. Before that however, from 2000 to 2008 Serbia refrained from doing so.

Holding local elections in the Serb-run northern districts is seen as especially problematic, as they will clearly reinforce Serbia's so-called "parallel institutions" in the north.

These post offices, schools and municipal administrations ignore the Kosovo government in Prishtina and depend for support and cash on Belgrade.

In practice, Serbian elections "in Kosovo" will not be noticed by the vast majority of people in the country.

Over 90 per cent of the population is Albanian and a significant number of the remaining Serbs live "south of the Ibar" in Albanian-run Kosovo.

Only four municipalities on the border with Serbia are likely to be affected by the decision, two of whom, Mitrovica and Leposavic, already held local elections, in 2010 and in 2009

respectively.

Serbian elections in Kosovo thus boil down essentially to two rural municipalities, Zvecan and Zubin Potok, where locals hope the elections indeed go ahead in time.

Dragisa Milovic, Mayor of Zvecan, said he saw no reason for UNMIK to put a stop on the polls.

"UNMIK was status neutral when the [Kosovo] Albanians held their local elections, so I don't see any reason why the same should not happen now," Milovic told Prishtina Insight.

The Deputy Mayor of Zubin Potok, Srdjan Djurovic, takes a similar stance. "I expect the Serbian authorities to carry out all the necessary preparations so that the elections can be held like they were in 2008," he told Prishtina Insight.

But if Belgrade fails to deliver, nudged by international opposition, it would not be the first time.

Earlier this year Serbia declined to support a Kosovo Serb plan to call a local referendum on February 15 and 16 on whether local Serbs planned to accept Kosovo institutions.

The US ambassador to Kosovo, Christopher Dell, meanwhile last week said including Kosovo in Serbia's spring polls would inflict more damage on Serbia than on Kosovo.

The elections come at delicate time for Belgrade, right after it obtained EU candidate status.

Brussels has been clear all along that Serbia must cease support for "parallel institutions" in the north of Kosovo if it wants to make the next step on its EU path - getting a start date for accession talks.

Zoran Stojiljkovic, of Belgrade University's Political Science Faculty, says calling local elections in Kosovo was a tactical move made ahead of Serbia's spring elections.

He believes that the ruling centrist Democrats had no choice but to include Kosovo in the local elections if they were not to court the outrage of Serbian nationalists.

"Voters would not forgive them for excluding Kosovo from local elections," he said. "And the opposition would draw an advantage from the government 'giving up' Kosovo," he added.

But Professor Stojiljkovic does not believe that Belgrade will seriously risk its further EU progress over Kosovo.

"Belgrade will find a compromise solution for the two tiny municipalities so that the elections are not held," he predicted.

Editor's Word

Kosovo: The Silicon Plain



By Lawrence Marzouk

Kosovo can strike a real blow to corruption, and put itself on the path to becoming a hub for the digital age, with one key policy commitment. It's called Open Data, and it could just revolutionise the country's economy. Let me explain how.

Hashim Thaci and his government may shout about their commitment to tackling corruption, but they're rather quiet when it comes to transparency.

Earlier this year we asked for invoices and receipts that had been submitted by various ministers for official visits, using the Access to Documents legislation.

We were aware that credit card numbers would have to be removed, but the law is clear that the public has a right to know what ministers, and the PM, are spending their - actually, our money on while on official duty.

What is there to stop the Prime Minister and his deputies bathing themselves in Bollinger Champagne at each five star hotel they visit on international tours, all placed on their government credit cards and paid for by you and me?

I have no evidence to suggest that they do, just as I have no evidence to suggest that they don't, because they refuse to reveal their spending.

Two ministers provided all of their receipts in a commendable display of openness; the rest, including Thaci, decided to release just their total spend, which is pretty useless.

These are not the actions of a government committed to openness.

No country can rely on its rule-of-law institutions alone to counter wrongdoing in public office. An active civil society, media and citizenry are also essential.

And in a country such as Kosovo, where these institutions may struggle for various reasons, an eagle-eyed public is even more important.

So rather than create another task-force, or committee, or focus group to sort out corruption in public institutions, Mr Thaci, how about empowering your citizens to do so?

Embrace transparency and the growing Open Data movement, which advocates that information collected by the state - so already paid for by taxpayers - should be made public.

Data collected by the state are, in the right hands, hugely valuable.

A study by Dr Rufus Pollock of Cambridge University, UK, on the value of the data held by the British government, estimated that its release would generate £6 billion to the economy.

One simple example of the positive impact that the release of data can have is a demonstrated by a mobile phone application available to Swedish commuters which gives them real-time updates on train times. The app allows people to use their time more efficiently, boosting the country's economy.

Could Kosovo become the Silicon Plain? With shrewd investments and a government committed to the "Open Data" movement, it can.

Everyone wants to be a "Silicon Something" these days. The original Silicon Valley has spawned many copycats, ranging from serious rivals to one-man-and-his-computer. We now have Silicon Alley, Silicon Welley, Silicon Mallee, not to mention Silicon Beach, Desert, Forest, Hill, Hills, Prairie, Glen, Gorge, Mall and Roundabout.

Belgrade even has its own Silicon Valley - Strahinjica Bana - although that has nothing to do with the concentration of IT start-ups and all about the concentration of It-girl up-starts.

The Indians have already laid claim to Silicon Plateau, so by my calculation Kosovo is left with Silicon Plain.

OK, Kosovo has yet to establish itself as a hub for high-tech innovations, but I can already hear the buzz beginning.

A Dutch outfit has just outsourced its programming to Prishtina for the creation of a mobile application for the Netherlands police force.

And look at the remarkable work of the team of young programmers who created prishtinabusinfo - the capital's first website detailing bus routes. Because of a lack of any official help - and absence of information - they plotted the routes using GPS devices.

This city is bursting with young, creative and talented people who could be offering their services to international clients.

Just imagine what would happen if the authorities actually decided to help.

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Kurti: I am Preparing for Government

Support for Vetevendosje is growing by the day, the leader of Vetevendosje Albin Kurti said in an interview with BIRN.



By Bujar Aruqaj

Albin Kurti, the enfant terrible of Kosovo politics, says his party, once a street movement, is preparing to govern Kosovo.

In an interview with BIRN's television show, *Jeta ne Kosove*, Kurti said that Vetevendosje is offering the only genuine opposition to the government in parliament.

"Many have said that we will not know how to act within the institutions," he said, referring to the movement's voyage from the streets to parliament. "But, we were the ones who called the most motions in the parliament. We were the ones who took the most initiatives. We will also know how to govern when it will be our turn to be in power."

He said that VV was developing a programme which will harness Kosovo's strengths, and not a passive programme which waits for "miracles to come from outside".

The media, he complained, does not present the diversity of the activities Vetevendosje carries out, focusing on its protests and attitude towards Serbia.

He also questioned the silence of the country's "intellectual elite" on the country's major challenges.

Kurti, however, conceded that VV's protests had faded recently. "We are examining the causes," he said. "Perhaps we didn't know how to do something. Of course, we are



Albin Kurti, Vetevendosje head, believes his party is often portrayed unfairly.

By Korab Basila

far from being perfect," he said.

He insisted that people are increasingly disappointed with the current regime.

"Vetevendosje is the infrastructure for the dissatisfied," he said. "The number of our supporters is growing, but also the fear."

He said that the Prime Minister's extreme statements in the run-up to VV's January 21 protests showed that Hashim Thaci was concerned.

"There is no democracy if you only vote once every four years, and even this vote gets stolen," he said. "Sociopolitical statistics show that there should be protests every day in this country."

Kurti also addressed recent allegations leveled at him by the PDK parliamentarian Bekim Haxhiu, known as Kamishi.

Haxhiu claimed to have obtained various police reports which detailed Kurti's cooperation with Serbs.

Kurti said he would not discuss the veracity of the allegations, but hit back saying that half of the current PDK assembly members were former members of its secret service, SHIK.

"The campaign was launched against us when we asked the

prime minister about his meetings with Serbian President Boris Tadic," he said.

In US diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks, secret meetings between Prime Minister Thaci and the President of Serbia are discussed. "When they meet with other leaders it is everywhere on the media. Why were the meetings with Tadic secret?" asked Kurti.

He believes that the allegations against him were made in order to deflect the attention of the public from the latest worrying developments in Kosovo. "They thought that they could blackmail me but they can no longer blackmail me and no other member of Vetevendosje," he said.

The former spokesman of the Kosovo Liberation Army also criticised some of its former members for misusing their reputation and enriching themselves in the name of the war, now and for the past 12 years. "I have respect for all those who contributed to the liberation, but the KLA does not mean amnesty: one year's war, and 12 years businessman. They are behaving like the population owes them something," said Kurti.

Kosovo Ombudsman Seeks Probe Into Abused Serbs

Ombudsperson says that he will demand an inquiry into police violence used against five men suspected of working for Serbia's Interior Ministry.



By Fatmir Aliu

Kosovo's public advocate says he wants an official inquiry into claims that Kosovo police used excessive violence against five Kosovo Serbs suspected of working for the Serbian police.

Ombudsperson Sami Kurteshi told Prishtina Insight that after his associates visited the five Serbs detained in Prishtina and Gjilane, they found evidence of abuse on their bodies, which the men claimed was the result of police beatings.

"The detainees showed us bruises, allegedly from beatings by the police. We have prepared a report and will file complaints to the Ministry of Interior and the Kosovo Police Inspectorate, demanding that they investigate," Kurteshi said.

Kosovo Police arrested six Kosovo Serbs last month in Partesh/Partes, in the Gjilane region, saying they suspected they worked for Serbia's Interior Ministry.

During the raid, the Kosovo Police said they found distinctive Serbian police weapons and ammunition.

One was later released, while the

five other alleged Serbian police were ordered into 30 days' detention, charged with pressurising compatriots not to recognize the authorities of the Kosovo government in Prishtina.

The prosecutor of the case says he suspects that the group also issued Serbian passports and driving licences within the territory of Kosovo, violating Kosovo laws.

But the Ombudsperson said that regardless of the charges, any violence used against them was totally unacceptable.

"After interviewing the detainees, we found out that the police used violence and abused the detainees on an ethnic basis," he said.

"The second issue is that the suspects held in Gjilane, during the visit by our team, complained that no doctor visited them to record the violence they'd allegedly suffered," Kurteshi added.

Days after the arrest, Serbia's Interior Minister, Ivica Dacic, admitted that four of the detained Serbs were indeed Serbian police employees.

The Ombudsman said EULEX personnel had also interviewed the detainees and had the same suspicions about excess police violence.

The EU rule of law mission spokesperson, Blerim Krasniqi, told Prishtina Insight that the detainees had "complained about the police's behaviour".



Police found weapons when arresting members of MUP in Kosovo

Kosovo War Crimes Trial Postponed

Prishtina's District Court postponed without any explanation Tuesday's session in the Klecka case trial.



By Fatmir Aliu

A Kosovo court was expected to decide on Tuesday whether the "Klecka case" can be sustained without the testimony of the key witness, which the defence counsels argue was taken illegally.

However, the hearing has been postponed without any official explanation.

Two years after he initiated the investigation, the Special Prosecutor of EU rule of law mission to Kosovo, EULEX, Maurizio Salustro, will have to explain to the

court, whether the diaries of the deceased witness Agim Zogaj will continue to form the foundation of his case or if he has other evidence.

Sources from EULEX have unofficially told BIRN that the trial has been postponed because the panel of judges needed more time to assess Salustro's response.

The source said that the trial should resume next week, "most probably on Monday."

Ten former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters, including their commander Fatmir Limaj, have pleaded not guilty to charges of war crimes against Serbs and Albanians at the Klecka detention centre committed in 1999.

Limaj's lawyer accused the prose-

cutor of having gathered all the evidence in the Klecka case illegally, and argued that Maurizio Salustro was not authorized to raid the house of his client for war crimes.

In April 2010, EULEX raided the ministry of transport during Fatmir Limaj's tenure as minister. That investigation relates to road construction tenders issued between 2007 and 2009.

Limaj's defence team claims that the prosecutor abused the legal process during the raid by confiscating photos of the war, and the military uniform of Fatmir Limaj, without a proper court warrant relating to the suspicion of war crimes.

The case, heard in front of Prishtina's District Court, rests

mainly on the testimony of the deceased Zogaj, who killed himself last September in Germany.

Zogaj, known as "Witness X", was a prison guard at the Klecka prison during the Kosovo war in 1999, and made notes in his diary about events there. The notes have provided the key testimony in the war crimes trial against his alleged commander Fatmir Limaj and nine other defendants.

Fatmir Limaj has already been tried and acquitted by the Hague Tribunal in 2007, for war crimes committed in another prison camp.

Prishtina's District Court is expected to decide later this month whether or not the testimony of Agim Zogaj is relevant to the trial.

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Kosovo Fritters Away Shrinking Science Budget

Money set aside for scientific advances in Kosovo has fallen sharply in recent years – and much of what remains has disappeared on foreign research trips and the printing of patriotic novels, Prishtina Insight has discovered.



By Petrit Collaku

“As education minister it is a distinct honour to testify before you on the commitment of the government of Kosovo to science and research.” So said Enver Hoxhaj in 2010 while launching Kosovo’s National Research Programme, a five-year-plan aimed at spearheading scientific progress in the country.

But an investigation has uncovered that two years on the scheme remains underfunded. Meanwhile large amounts of the funds that have been provided have been spent on sending academics to foreign conferences and on publishing patriotic and historical books.

Prishtina Insight can also reveal that some members of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, MEST, including the manager of the fund, have benefited from these grants. Two prominent politicians who receive salaries from the state budget also received financing to publish their books.

Isa Elezaj, PhD and lecturer in University of Prishtina, criticised the allocation of funds. “I am sorry to say it but there are numerous cases of professors that have received grants, thinking they would get rich,” Elezaj said.

Lack of funding:

The National Research Programme was aimed at injecting large sums of money into, and coordinating, research in Kosovo.

It was prepared by the National Council of Science, which was created as part of the law for scientific activity, which came in force in February 2005. The government and parliament approved the programme in 2010.

But funding for the scheme has fallen well short of planned levels. In 2010 the programme received the requested 1million euro, but in 2011 and 2012 the funds fell to 400,000

euro, well below the 2.4 million and 3.4 million euro that had been budgeted.

This means that the government allocated just 0.03 per cent of the 2011 budget – 400,000 euro – to scientific research.

Half of this sum went on funding nine research budgets. The rest went on some 14 foreign trips, the publication of historic, patriotic and poetry books and the purchase of an online library.

Among the researches funded was the work of Agni Dika, a doctor of electronics and computer science and professor at the University of Prishtina. He received 25,000 euro for a two-year project to create software that reads scanned texts in Albanian.

Hysen Bytyqi was awarded 22,000 euro to study a local breed of cow, the Basha, which is in danger of extinction in Kosovo.

Sejdi Rexhepi obtained 30,000 euro for a project labelled “local economic development and its impact on social welfare”.

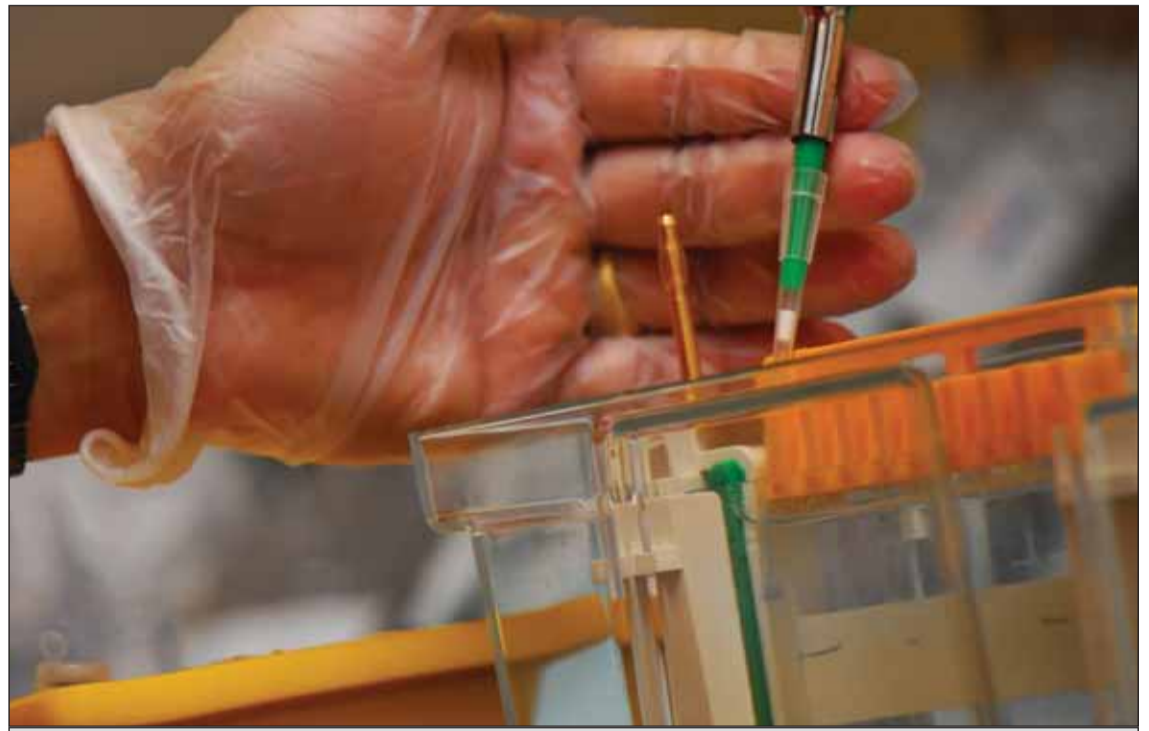
Another project dealt with veterinary issues, namely “Salmonella’s prevalence in poultry farms infected with *Dermanyssus Gallina* in Kosovo”, a one-year project costing 20,000 euro.

But the most expensive project was the study on “Epic on Knights - Albanian cultural heritage monuments in the Balkans, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia”, by Zymer Neziri. He received almost 60,000 euro for this project.

Two senior officials from the MEST also benefited from the funds allocated for science. One has published a book, and the second one took part in a conference in Bosnia.

Among the financed authors were two well-known politicians, Arsim Bajrami and Bajram Kosumi.

The director of the science and technology department in the ministry, Murteza Osdautaj, who is responsible for the funding, told Prishtina Insight that the government was interested in studies that



Funds aimed at sparking innovation in Kosovo have mostly been spent on historical research.

have an immediate impact.

“The National Programme is good but it cannot be realised, knowing the [small size of the] country’s budget,” Osdautaj said.

But some university professors aren’t impressed with how the National Programme has been run.

Isa Elezaj says that even with this small amount of money, the science budget could have been better managed. “Kosovo needs research in agriculture and food safety, in biology and medicine sciences,” he said.

Foreign trips:

Half the funds went on financing trips to conferences, mostly on history and religion in Albania.

Rexhep Doqi took part in a conference in Tirana, Albania, last October on the Pellazg civilisation, an ancient Balkan people, at a cost of 330 euro.

Nuridin Ahmeti researched “Catholic Clergy and Bektashi in the Albanian National Movement, 1908-1912” in Macedonia in December 2011 at a cost of 1,500 euro.

Frasher Demaj went to London from December 2 to 25 to research “The stance of British diplomacy towards Albanians, 1878-1914”. The cost of this research was 1,500 euro.

Afrim Gjeleja went to Austria last November to research on information technology at a cost of 1,500

euro.

The majority of these trips fell under the Programme’s fifth, and lowest, priority: “language, cultural and historical studies”.

The ministry handed out 50,000 euro from the same fund for publications of different books. One was a biography of the political activist Ismail Dumoshi written by Izber Hoti.

Even Osdautaj, director of the project, and Malush Mjaku, head of the division for technology at the ministry, also received funds.

Osdautaj had 500 copies of his book “Poetry in Literature” printed. He says he took part in the competition for funds and his position did not give him an unfair advantage.

“My work was exposed to professional review by two external reviewers and exposed, as all other competitions, to external evaluation by the ‘ad hoc’ committee of the Scientific Council of the ministry and the minister,” he said.

Mjaku received 1,500 euro for a project that took him to Bosnia. “I applied and the commission decided to finance my project. I have applied several times but this time I was accepted,” Mjaku told Prishtina Insight.

The ministry also paid another 56,000 euro to establish an online library called ISI Web of Knowledge, a research platform to find, analyse and share informa-

tion on science.

But another established library, EBSCO, is already available and had cost only 9,015 euro. This online library also provides the newest information for research organisations.

Experts say that the time has come for businesses and science to become closely linked. The President of the Kosovo’s Chamber of Commerce, Safet Gerxhaliu, said the public-private partnership should be strengthened.

“There is no future for a country with ad hoc visions,” Gerxhaliu told Prishtina Insight.

Rasim Bejtullahu, maths and physics theorist in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, agrees and is also critical of the scheme’s priorities.

“From what I have seen, it looks like building the pyramid from the tip up,” he said.

National Programme’s five priorities

- 1) Natural resources, energy and environment
- 2) Agricultural production and food safety
- 3) Scientific research in medicine
- 4) Social and economic studies
- 5) Linguistic, cultural and historical study

Kosovo Women Want Justice, Not Flowers

Kosovo’s Women Network called on Serbia to apologise for the crimes its police and paramilitary forces committed during the war in 1999.



By Fatmir Aliu

In a protest in Prishtina last Thursday, hundreds of women gathered for over an hour in front of Kosovo’s government building, asking for a pro-active approach in talks with Belgrade, and justice for all the women and

girls raped during the conflict.

Kosovo’s Women Network director Igballe Rogova, who organised the protest, told the crowd that ever since the end of the war, women victims have been isolated by the negligence of the authorities both in Prishtina and Belgrade.

“We’ve been neglected, hurt and blamed for 13 years. But the women victims have nothing to be blamed for. But they are not alone, we want justice for all women and

girls raped during the war,” she said.

Scores of women and girls were raped and sexually abused during the 1998-1999 Kosovo conflict by both sides, the majority of them Kosovo Albanian women.

Human Rights Watch found that rapes were used as a weapon of war and as an instrument to terrorize the civilian population.

The protesters who preferred to demonstrate rather than, as they said, receive flowers on

International Women’s Day, were holding banners displaying messages such as “Serbia should apologize for the crimes committed in Kosovo” and “We don’t want flowers, we want justice for raped women during the war.”

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in February 2008, a secession which Serbia does not recognise. Under EU brokered talks, both parties agreed on a range of issues relating to freedom of movement, and the regional

representation of Kosovo.

The women protesters said that the last agreement the Kosovo’s government signed with Serbia made them ashamed.

“Instead of asking for compensation for war damage all these years, they should have been asking for justice for the raped women,” said Rogova, adding that the Prime Minister Thaci, through the integrated border management deal, has opened Kosovo’s borders “for our rapists to return.”



Spectre of Border Changes Still Haunts Balkans

New policy paper suggesting frontiers may yet have to be adjusted in the region has revived debate on a hoary topic that never quite goes away.



By Darko Duridanski

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs, GIISA, has stirred controversy by suggesting that border changes are likely in future in the Balkans.

Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia were cited as the countries most likely ones to face ethnic-political conflicts, according to the institute's research paper entitled "Expect the unexpected".

"Another round of border changes is in the offing in the Western Balkans," Dusan Reljic, Serbian analyst for GIISA wrote in his part of the paper entitled, "Border Changes on the Cards again in the Western Balkans".

"Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina are still fragile political entities, lingering in the status of Western protectorates, as is the Republic of Macedonia," he writes.

A recent upsurge of tension in Serb-run parts of northern Kosovo has additionally rung alarm bells concerning possible new border changes in the region. Such questions have been on and off the table in the Balkans for more than 20 years, ever since the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation.

This began in 1991 and during the 1990s resulted in the formation of six republics, followed by Kosovo, which seceded from Serbia in 1999 with Western support.

But ideas about new borders have never ceased to appear. Since

the signing of the 1995 Dayton peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, voices saying the two-entity state is not viable have regularly been heard.

Other hotspots include north-western Macedonia, populated mostly with Albanians, Serb Northern Kosovo, Southern Serbia, where the majority is Albanian, Serbia's Sandzak region, which has a majority Muslim population, the north of Vojvodina in Serbia, where there is a big Hungarian minority, parts of Montenegro, which have a significant Albanian community, and even western Greece, home to a large Albanian population.

While Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia are clearly the hotspots, trouble could be avoided if the countries stay firmly on the EU path, experts say. Stevo Pendarovski, former security advisor to two Macedonian presidents and professor at the Skopje-based University American College, believes the weakest point is Macedonia but he does not see border changes as likely.

"We will not see any change in borders in the foreseeable future. But if the borders really "move" in Western Europe as mentioned in the publication by the German institute, why should it not happen in the Balkans?" he told Prishtina Insight. "However, a change of borders in the Balkans is not possible in a peaceful manner; the big powers won't allow it," he added, noting that the international community has invested great efforts into gluing matters together in the Balkans.

Balkan correspondent for the Economist Tim Judah is equally

skeptical about changes in frontiers. "If nothing radical changes in Europe I do not see a possibility for change of the Balkan borders in foreseeable future," he told Prishtina Insight.

Krenar Gashi, director of the Kosovo's Institute for Development Policy, told Prishtina Insight that new borders would mean that 20 years of peace-building in the Balkans had passed in vain, which no major international players are ready to swallow.

But he says that the rise in tensions in some areas must not be underestimated.

"Seeing that so many tensions and conflicts in the Balkans remain active, I would not rule out that the big international players would consider it [a change in borders] at some point," Gashi said.

According to Reljic's paper, Bosnia is out of frame for now because the possibility for reconciliation there is greater than it is in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Reljic wrote that no serious political force in Zagreb or Belgrade supports the secession and then the annexation of Bosnia's Serb or Croat regions. "Even more importantly, Bosniaks (Muslims), Serbs and Croats, speak the same language and share a great deal of cultural commonality," he wrote.

"Albanian, on the other hand, is a completely different language from Serbian or Macedonian and the culture and traditions of the largely Muslim Albanians have little in common with the overwhelmingly Orthodox Slavic ethnic groups," Reljic wrote.

"There is a lot of hatred in Kosovo and if this doesn't change

the problems will stay," agreed Darko Trifunovic, from the Belgrade-based Faculty for Security.

"If this culminates, it may easily overflow into Macedonia which is very fragile when it comes to interethnic relations," he adds.

But after Belgrade and Prishtina reached an interim agreement at the end of February and Serbia resolved one of its last hurdles preventing its closer access to the European Union, experts say the Kosovo issue has been put on one side at least for a while.

Pendarovski thinks it is important for Kosovo to stay on the EU integration road.

Otherwise, if Kosovo remains in a state of disintegration and is not recognized for a longer time, this could prompt it to bid for territorial compensation in south Serbia or in Macedonia. "Macedonia then is the weakest point and this kind of development can create big problems in its western parts," Pendarovski says.

He says positive developments in the region can come with Serbia's EU integration, which will be conditioned on Serbia cutting relations with the Northern Kosovo Serbs who cannot survive without Belgrade's help.

"The second positive development is if Kosovo also obtains full external recognition, then the chances of an overflow of the crisis to the south will be drastically reduced," he continues.

Trifunovic believes that the only way to halt talk of border changes for good is for all South East European countries to sit round a table and agree on the

future.

"With Bosnia on one side, only the Albanian issue is in the picture. But that can be solved with a peace conference where all Southeast European countries agree to warn Albanian nationalism that new borders are not acceptable," he says.

Prishtina-based analyst Gashi also thinks the big problems can be resolved by countries in the Western Balkans progressing towards the EU.

Although the European Union is slow to act and lacks unity, it must not leave Balkan countries out of the enlargement process since "this leaves more space for nationalism to spark again. "The EU through its foreign and enlargement policy could once and forever be the guarantor of the current borders," Gashi maintains.

Srečko Latal, an International Crisis Group analyst based in Sarajevo, Bosnia, thinks that ideas about border changes should be seen mainly as speculation, as political maneuvers or just as the concerns of analysts. The roots of these radical ideas lie in the unresolved ethnic, political, economic and social issues in all Balkan countries, he maintains.

Countries in the region can make progress only by internal agreement, tolerance, respect for differences and stronger efforts to approach the EU, he opines. "Otherwise, intolerance, ethnic and political, will lead to marginalization, poverty and new agonies for all peoples, ethnic communities and citizens of the Balkans," Latal says.

Kosovo Police Arrest Four PDK Officials

Three municipal directors and a municipal assembly member in Vushtrri, all members of the governing Democratic Party of Kosovo, have been arrested on charges of organised crime.



By Fatmir Aliu

Four senior municipal officials in Vushtrri in northern Kosovo - three company directors and a local assembly member - were arrested last Tuesday on suspicion of organized crime and corruption, police said.

Kosovo Police spokesperson Brahim Sadriu told Prishtina Insight that the Special Anti-Corruption Task Force raided the offices of the officials and seized documents relating to the case.

"After several months of investigation, police raided the offices at the municipality of Vushtrri and arrested four persons," he said.

"The four are suspected of the criminal offences of illegal expropriation of municipal property,

abusing their official positions or authorizations, influencing bids and organized crime," Sadriu said.

Sources from Vushtrri told Prishtina Insight that the suspects are the director of municipal inspectorate, the director of property and cadastral office and a member of the local municipal assembly. All belong to the governing Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, led by the country's Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci.

In raids on a number of private houses and other localities in Vushtrri, police confiscated one revolver, ammunition, documents and a laptop.

A pre-trial judge at Mitrovica District Court ordered restrictive measures on three of the suspects.

The order prohibits them from approaching the other defendants in the case, as well as approaching officials and the offices of the

municipality.

The fourth arrested individual - the Municipal Director of Public Services according to local media reports - was released on the order of the prosecutor.

All four individuals continue to remain under investigation related to various criminal offences including "Unlawful Occupation of Real Property, Abusing Official Position or Authority, Trading in influence, and Organised Crime".

Ex-Minister Queries Missing Millions in Kosovo Power Station Deal

Former Energy Minister Justina Pula-Shiroka is critical of plans to hand all profits from the Kosovo B power plant for six years to the private developer of Kosovo's new lignite-fuelled station.



By Parim Olluri

Five days after the winning bid to build Kosovo's new lignite-fired power plant, Kosova e Re, is revealed, Kosovo's current power station, Kosovo B, will be handed over to the new plant's private investor.

For the six years, all profits from Kosovo B will be collected by the winner of the bid as compensation for making capital investments in building the new 600Megawatt facility, Kosova e Re.

A former energy minister, Justina Pula-Shiroka, has queried whether this represents a good deal, saying she opposed it when it was ratified by parliament.

Since leaving the government last year, she has become vocal in her opposition to the deal, also criticising what she calls meddling by international advisors.

As part of the plan, a new power company, "Gen Co", will be formed, of which 75 per cent of shares will be privately owned and 25 per cent held by the government.

This new private firm will build the new power plant and will at the same time refurbish Kosovo B. This will then allow for the closure of Kosovo A, which has been branded Southeast Europe's worst polluter.

According to Pula-Shiroka, transaction advisors PriceWaterhouse Cooper calculated that for Kosovo to retain 25 per cent of the shares in Kosova e Re, the private firm should receive 70 million euro from Kosovo B profits in order to fund its capital investment in the new power plant. This would cover, they said, all profits for six years.

PWC says this is the value of the profit that it estimates that Kosovo B will make over that period.



Kosovo A is set to be decommissioned as part of the government's plans to hand to build a new power plant.

But Shiroka-Pula says the government estimates the profit for Kosovo B for six years is between 162 to 340 million euro.

"This amount exceeds the projected capital investment in the construction of the new power plant," Shiroka-Pula said in a July 2010 letter seen by this newspaper and submitted to the government-backed steering committee of the project.

"The calculations performed by the transaction advisors [PWC] on Kosovo B's value are not convincing and are unacceptable," she added.

According to the plan, after Kosovo e Re, which means "New Kosovo", is built and after Kosovo B has been renovated, profits will be distributed along the 25/75 per cent of shares.

Despite the then minister's disapproval, parliament approved the decision to add the Kosovo B plant as part of the tender package for the construction of the new plant in April 2010.

Four international companies have meanwhile prequalified for the tender for the project.

These are Adani Power/PT Adani Global, from India and

Indonesia, AES Electric Ltd/Demir Export AS, from the US and Turkey, Park Holding, from Turkey, and PPC/Contour Global LLP, from Greece, Britain and the US.

This tender is scheduled for completion in 2012, led by a new transaction advisor Raiffeisen Investment AG, who will provide advice during the year.

Pula-Shiroka, who was part of the steering committee, rejected the recommendations of the original transaction advisor, PWC, regarding the six-year plan.

"The government is providing a location and water for the private investors who will build the new power plant," Shiroka-Pula told Prishtina Insight.

"It is unreasonable to add in Kosovo B in order to have 25 per cent of the shares in 'Gen Co'," she added.

She says the winning company will be able to obtain credit from international financial institutions to build the new plant and will be able to pay off the loans with the profits drawn from consumers' electricity bills.

The ex-minister two years ago proposed that Kosovo B's profits

should continue to go to the state budget, but this was not supported by the then transaction advisor [PWC].

"Giving Kosovo B allows for the investment of profits in the construction of New Kosovo," PWC said in answers given to Shiroka Pula on July 27, 2010.

"In such a way the overall price is deducted for the construction of the new power plant.

"The contribution of Kosovo B in 'Gen Co' also enables the Government of Kosovo to ensure a share in 'Gen Co' without having to invest government funds, which are currently limited," PWC wrote in documents seen by this newspaper.

The government had planned initially to hold a separate transaction process for the privatization of Kosovo B.

But according to the transaction advisor, PWC, this posed a risk, because it was possible that failure in one could derail the other.

PWC said linking the two this would ensure better coordination between the rehabilitation of Kosovo B and the decommissioning or closure of Kosovo A.

"Another benefit derived from this, perhaps the biggest benefit, is that if we have a single owner we will avoid administrative burdens and protocols and contracts for common use," PWC advised.

A power purchase agreement should be signed between "Gen Co." and the company running the distribution network of KEK, which is also being privatised.

Through the Energy Regulatory Office, the government will have an indirect role, according to PWC, in monitoring the agreement, including over price rises.

Meanwhile, civil society groups are also demanding that Kosovo B be treated independently.

Nezir Sinani of think-tank INDEP told Prishtina Insight that because Kosovo B remains profitable, it should be privatised separately.

"There is no logic for Kosovo B to be sold in a tender alongside Kosovo e Re, thereby creating a monopoly of power generation, which at the end of the day will disadvantage consumers," he said.

Kosovo Taxman Targets Petrol Pumps

Kosovo's tax authority will launch this month a drive for new cash registers to be installed at petrol stations across the country.

Some 760 business are targeted as part of the drive to raise more tax through petrol stations, which are already bringing in 4 million euro a year.

The new cash registers will be linked to the petrol pump and provide details of the amount of fuel supplied to the tax administration.

Behxhet Haliti, of the tax administration, told Prishtina Insight that by June they expect fuel pumps to be connected to these new registers. He said that similar

systems in Italy and Albania have been successful.

But petrol station owners are concerned of the price to install these new machines. Al Petrol already uses the original fiscal registers.

Financial director Tahir Zogaj said these aren't well adapted to petrol sta-

tions, but that the new registers could prove too costly.

"These devices, according to calculations, would be costly and difficult to apply to all sales points in Kosovo," he said.

He called on the government to provide funding for the roll-out.

Serbia "Leads" Rest of Balkans in FDI in 2011

Foreign investors appear to see Serbia as the best place to invest in the Balkans right now thanks to its cheap labour and tax exemptions.



By Bojana Barlovac

Serbia attracted more than 2 billion dollars worth of Foreign Direct Investment in 2011, the Chamber of Commerce has said.

Large foreign companies that came to Serbia in 2011 include: Belgian retailer Delhaize, German electronics company Bosch, Italian manufacturer Benetton, US rubber and tire company Cooper Tires and Austrian crystal company Swarovski.

The total net inflow of FDI in Serbia in 2010 amounted 1.16 billion dollars.

Milan Kovacevic, an expert in foreign investment, told Prishtina Insight that the FDI figure included both direct investment and acquisitions (when a foreign company purchases shares in a domestic company).

With a sluggish economy and a high unemployment rate of almost 24 per cent, Serbia is counting on foreign investments as a means to move forward and halt the rise in joblessness.

In February, Serbian Prime Minister Mirko Cvetkovic declared that Serbia had become the regional leader in terms of



Serbia is proving popular with foreign investors, such as Benetton.

the amount of FDI it attracted last year.

Neighbouring Croatia used to lead Southeastern Europe in foreign direct investment before the 2009 global recession struck.

But, according to Kovacevic, foreign investors now prefer Serbia instead. "Serbia has a good potential for investors as it has a big market, salaries are quite low and the government still provides

tax exemptions for foreign companies," Kovacevic told Prishtina Insight.

According to auditing firm KPMG, Serbia has another advantage - the lowest business taxes in Europe.

The government also pays up to 13,000 dollars for each new job or up to 20 per cent of the total investment in capital investments.

Bosnia Federation Orders Probe into Top Drugs Firm

Bosnia's Federation entity government has ordered Edin Arslanagic's removal as head of Bosnalijek pharmaceuticals and ordered financial police to investigate the company for corruption.



By Elvira Jukic

The director of Bosnia's top pharmaceutical company, Bosnalijek, is to be removed from his post and the company investigated for financial irregularities and possible corruption, the Federation government decided at the session on March 7 in Sarajevo.

The decision was unanimous after months of information gathering raised questions about the management methods used by Arslanagic, who has been running the firm for the past two decades.

"Our first conclusion is to call the supervisory board to organize an urgent session and decide to remove the whole management of the company," Prime Minister Nermin Niksic said.

"We are demanding that the financial police investigate the business of Bosnalijek, as well as some other related companies like Brstanica, Rhea and Royal Express," he added.

Bosnalijek's largest shareholder is the government of the Federation entity, which holds 19.3 per cent of the company.

Other shareholders include funds and banks, which own some 5 to 9 per cent of shares, and several companies and employees.

If the supervisory board does not remove Arslanagic and the rest of the management, including one of his sons, the Federation's ministry of industry will urge shareholders to decide whether they trust Arslanagic.

Regardless of the decision of the supervisory board, financial police are to conduct the investigation.

Bosnalijek is a successful company which recorded a 2011 revenue of 55 million euro, 5 per cent up from 2010. Their net profit that year was around €3 million, which was about 42 per cent up on the previous year.

At the beginning of 2012, Arslanagic said more than 50 per cent of the company's total revenues in 2011 came from exports, which increased by around 22 per cent in 2011, totaling some 28 million euro.

Black Sea Gas Finds Boost Romania's Energy Prospects

Major discovery of gas reserves in Black Sea gives Romania hope of becoming fully self-sufficient in energy.



By Marian Chiriac

A newly discovered natural gas deposit in Romanian territory in the Black Sea may offer the possibility of temporary total self-sufficiency in energy, as its reserves are estimated to be six times Romania's annual consumption.

Preliminary estimates put the undersea gas deposit at anything between 42 and 84 billion cubic metres. Furthermore, four or five other gas deposits will soon be revealed in the same area, according to officials.

Romania has the prospect of obtaining total energy independence. If several other deposits... have the same amounts of gas, as we suspect they do, our country will become a source of gas for other countries in Europe as well, President Traian Basescu said early this week after visiting a drilling ship belonging to energy company ExxonMobil.

Exploitation of the Black Sea "Neptun" field, where ExxonMobil together with Austria's OMV Petrom will drill, is expected to start in 2015, after more examinations.

According to an initial estimate, the total amount of investment needed to exploit the gas deposit could be about 10 billion dollar.

The Balkan country currently produces about 11 billion cubic metres of gas a year, representing about 80 per cent of its annual needs.

It imports the remainder exclusively from Russia. Bucharest is looking to reduce its dependence on Russian energy, mainly by diversifying gas supply routes.

Romania was a major oil producer back in the 1930s. In 1937, when it produced 7.2 million tons, Romania ranked seventh in the world in terms of oil production.

Nowadays, Romania still produces some oil, at around 3.5 million tons per year, but this level of production isn't nearly enough to make the country self-sufficient.

Now, facing a growing need for cash, Bucharest is planning to award new oil and gas concessions in the Black Sea region.

Alexandru Patruti, head of Romania's Mineral Resources Agency, ANRM, said recently that the global crisis had kept investors away from auctions held last year, but he hoped that new blocks put up for auction would attract investors.

Romania awarded exploration licenses for five offshore blocks in 2010, with OMV Petrom, Exxon Mobil Corp, Petro Ventures Europe BV and Russia's Lukoil among the companies searching for oil and gas in the Black Sea.



Gas rigs could be built in the Black Sea to fuel Romania's energy needs.

Imam's Dismissal Divides Muslims in Albania

Sacking blamed on leadership of Albanian Muslim Community's intolerance of more Arab-influenced followers.



By Gjergj Erebara

Albania's Muslim community is embroiled in a row following the dismissal of Lulzim Plloçi, imam of the "Mosque of the Madrasa" in Tirana, and its khatib, or preacher, Ferid Piku.

The move is perceived as part of an attack by the leadership of the Muslim Community, MCA, which favours a so-called Turkish brand of Islam, on clerics educated in Arab countries.

Reacting to the dismissal of the two religious leaders, their followers have taken to the social networks questioning the decision.

Condemnation of the dismissals has also come from the League of Albanian Imams, a splinter group from the MCA, which favours an Arab brand of Islam.

The MCA was founded in 1991 following the collapse of Albania's Communist regime, which had banned religious organization for 34 years, proclaiming Albania the world's first atheist state.

The split between the two groups started in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks on America, when the government was forced to examine the background of foreign Islamic charities operating in the country.

While Arab organizations propped up the cash-starved resurgent Islamic community in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of Communism, Turkish religious doctrines have gained favour since.

Turkish Islam is regarded as culturally more in step with Albania's Muslims and less vulnerable to radicalized religious interpretation.

Private Islamic Turkish charities have established religious and non-religious schools in Albania that have become known for good discipline and high academic standards.

The madrasa of Tirana, like others in Albania, is controlled by the SEMA, the religious foundation run by the Turkish Gulen movement, which is known for building internationally educational systems.

According to observers of Albania's religious communities, Turkish influence is definitely on



Albania's Muslims are embroiled in a battle between different factions.

the increase, while Arab influence is on the wane.

The MCA ruling removed the mosque from the authority of the mufti of Tirana and placed it under the authority of the madrasa, leading to the dismissal of the two clerics.

"Imam Luli [Plloçi] is not a bad imam and in this mosque he has done a lot of good work," one of his supporters wrote on Facebook.

"Now we are learning that his problem is that does not wear a Western suit and won't cut his beard in exchange for a moustache," the same supporter added,

criticizing the decision.

"These Nursists are taking over the whole Muslim Community," said another, referring to the Turkish religious scholar Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, which is considered the inspirational figure of the Gulen Movement.

Confirming his dismissal, Plloçi told Prishtina Insight that his supporters were organizing a group to oppose the decision. Meanwhile, the MCA declined to comment, arguing that the decision was not newsworthy.

The League of Albanian Imams said the dismissals were based on

"clan" interests, which aim to destroy the multi-cultural nature of Albania's Islamic community.

"The dismissive tendencies transmitted by the MCA leadership, will only bring conflicts among believers, disturbing social peace among them, while brewing unnecessary hatred," the League said in a statement.

"Imams are guides and educators for their followers and cannot be treated as mosques administrators, which can be moved around, dismissed or transferred as they were working for a private company," the League added.

Macedonia's A1 TV Owner Jailed for 13 Years

A Skopje court sentenced the owner of the now defunct pro-opposition A1 TV Velija Ramkovski to 13 years in jail on four charges of tax evasion, criminal association money laundering and misuse of office.



By Sase Dimovski, Sinisa Jakov Marusic

The high-profile trial that started a year ago was one of the largest and most controversial in recent years.

The court jailed 21 of the 22 other co-defen-

dants in the same case and gave one a probation sentence. Sentences vary from two years and three months to seven years.

"The court found that the defendants conducted criminal acts from 2006 onwards through the accounts of A1 TV and several other companies" said Judge Pavlina Hristova while pronouncing the verdict.

The court ordered that all the property of the defendants be frozen and that they pay a solidarity fine of a million euros in total.

Ramkovski's defence said it will appeal the verdict in a higher instance court.

Ramkovski pleaded not guilty to all charges. He claimed he was set up by the government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski for political reasons.

He insisted that the evidence against him was forged as the computers and documentation from his firms were seized outside legal procedure.

The closures last summer of his A1 TV station and his three daily newspapers were widely blamed on government pressure.

Gruevski has denied this, saying the government had nothing to do with it. Tax inspectors said the outlets owed large sums in unpaid taxes.

Ramkovski and seven of the 22 accused have spent almost 15 months in detention after police arrested them in December 2010.

Most of the others were released after spending several months in detention after rights groups voiced concern for their wellbeing.

Police are still searching for Ramkovski's son Hedi and five others wanted in relation to the case. In absentia Hedi received a 7-year sentence in jail.

Words of Serbia's Late PM Djindjic Live On

Nine years have passed since the death of Serbia's pro-Western Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, but his bon mots live on.



By Bojana Barlovac

Serbian officials laid wreaths and flowers today at the grave of the country's first democratically ori-

ented prime minister, Djindjic, who was assassinated in front of the government building on March 12, 2003.

At the same time, his thoughts and witticisms have been clogging up Twitter and Facebook feeds, as many Serbs marked the anniversary by posting their favourite quote.

Here are some of the most famous citations:

- "There are weeds in every country, but only in Serbia they are being watered."
- "To be popular you must accept the risk of unpopularity."
- "If anyone believes that the enforcement of laws will be stopped if I am done away with, they are very wrong, because I am not the system."
- "Our objective is to have a transparent government, as transparent as glass."
- "The only answer to the lack of energy is - the accelerated circulation of energy."
- "Don't ask what your country can do for you. Ask yourself what you can do for yourself, and your country will help you do it."
- "Once you start overtaking vehicles, hit the gas. Do what you believe is right, and not what the majority would support."
- "No more sleep. You cannot be world champions by sleeping. Sleep five, six hours, you do not need more. You will sleep when you retire."
- "When people are constantly being told: I love you as you are, then such populism will get support, and that is indeed irresponsible."
- "We are still in the position of those who cut the whole forest and planted some seedlings, and now are surprised that there is no shade."
- "As a man who had been kept under water for 50 years, wishing to gasp some air, Serbia cannot be stopped on its path to oxygen, and that is Europe: a family of democratic, modern and developed countries."
- "Enlargement must not stop at the Balkans but must include the Balkans."



Velija Ramkovski, above, will appeal is sentence.



Macedonia Steps Back from the Brink

Fears of all-out conflict may be easing in ethnically divided Macedonia, but no cure is in sight for the country's endemic tensions.



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

Fears of a recrudescence of large-scale ethnic conflict are receding in Macedonia after police said the number of violent ethnic-related incidents had dropped in the last 48 hours.

The welcome news follows a week of Albanian-Macedonian "incidents" in the capital and other towns that have sparked worries about the future of ethnic harmony in the country.

Police say they have arrested more than 30 suspects so far, confiscating a sizable arsenal of weapons and even some firearms.

While current tensions may be easing in the short term, some observers lament a long-term trend towards poor political management of Albanian-Macedonian relations.

But while those same experts blame the politicians for fomenting ethnic intolerance, they do not believe the incidents will spiral up into a repetition of the armed conflict that the country experienced

in 2001.

That year Macedonia suffered a nationwide insurgency pitting the security forces against ethnic Albanian fighters.

The fighting only ended after the brokering of the Ohrid Accord, which guaranteed greater rights to Albanians who make up about a quarter of country's population of about 2.1 million.

However, while Macedonia seems likely to avoid civil war, a cure for the country's endemic ethnic tension is nowhere in sight.

"Violence among ethnic Macedonians and Albanians is not new but is a consequence of systematic segregation in the schools and elsewhere, conducted over a number of years," Xhabir Derala, head of Civil - Center for Freedom, a local NGO, says.

"On top of that, young people in this country are pumped full of nationalism by institutions of the state," he adds.

Derala's organization has been at the forefront of a nationwide campaign against the widespread civil use of firearms.

Macedonia's ethnic relations have been put to the test since the start of the year when partici-

pants in a village carnival in western Macedonia donned masks mocking the Muslim faith.

The bad-taste parade angered the country's predominantly Muslim Albanian community and soon after an Orthodox church was set on fire near the southwestern town of Struga and a Macedonian flag was torched.

The tensions gained further momentum on February 28 when an off-duty Macedonian policeman shot dead two young ethnic Albanians in the western town of Gostivar.

Protesting Albanians later described the killings as ethnically motivated and accused the police of downplaying their significance.

Last week more reports arrived of continuing low-level violence. Victims included an 18-year-old youth and a 19-year-old, stabbed by unknown perpetrators in Skopje in two separate incidents.

On Wednesday masked men armed with baseball bats stormed a commuter bus in Skopje and beat up several young ethnic Albanians.

Hours later there were two other similar fracasos on other buses, resulting in more injured people ending up in hospital.

"I do not exclude the fact that some people in Macedonia wish to disturb inter-ethnic relations," Police Minister Gordana Jankulovska said on Wednesday, urging "a calming of tensions".

But despite the appeals for calm coming from politicians and international representatives, violence continued.

In the following days several minors were beaten or stabbed, a policeman sustained light knife injuries intervening in a brawl and a man in his sixties was attacked.

Stevo Pendarovski, political advisor to former presidents Boris Trajkovski and Branko Crvenkovski, laments a "bad psy-

chosis that is being left to boil".

However, as fears spread on the internet of some kind of "spring offensive" on the part of ethnic Albanians, Pendarovski dismisses this speculation as unwarranted.

The latest incidents "have no potential for wider destabilization of the country or causing a similar conflict to that in 2001," he says.

"The groups behind the violence do not have serious backing from influential political parties to cause a wider stir," he adds.

Pendarovski blames Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his centre-right VMRO DPMNE party for allowing tensions to mount by ignoring the need to nurture the ethnic relations.

"The Macedonian side has totally forgotten the spirit of the 2001 accord, which dictates close consultation with the Albanian community over important issues," he maintains.

Mono-ethnic projects centred on the Macedonian majority, such the "Skopje 2014" project, intended to revamp the capital, have "alienated Albanians from the state," he adds.

Security expert at Skopje's Faculty for War and Peace Studies, Biljana Vankovska, sees a degree of orchestration behind the incidents, and a conscious attempt to show that Macedonians and Albanians cannot live together.

"This is no spontaneous outburst of rage from ordinary people who all of a sudden decided to put hoods over their heads and start beating people," she says.

"This is an obvious tactic of destabilization and it is astonishing how easily they have succeeded," she adds.

"Each group hits innocent and random targets, intentionally spreading the psychosis and provoking the same kind of reply from the other side," she notes.

Observers predict that the recent tensions may be defused by fresh political deals between the

ruling parties, open or secret, resulting in concessions on a couple of heated ethnic issues.

One hot issue for ethnic Albanians is the question of state pensions for the former Albanian rebels in the 2001 conflict.

Another is renaming streets in the capital after ethnic Albanian heroes and notable personalities.

Both issues have already been opened, and Albanian parties want them pushed forward.

But even if deals ensue on both topics, "the mechanisms of the ruling party for dealing with ethnic tensions will not improve in the next years", Pendarovski predicts.

And some go further, including the possibility of an escalation. "The violence won't stop and the security situation will get worse," Derala, from the Civil - Center for Freedom, warns.

"Metal bars and baseball clubs may easily be replaced by guns," he adds.

Prime Minister Gruevski meanwhile on Sunday rubbished accusations that the authorities have in some way condoned the attacks so that they can later appear as "fire-fighters" and as heroes.

"I've heard that such claims are being made, especially on social networks and I'm stunned," the Prime Minister said.

"I don't think I've never heard more stupid statements."

But Derala says that the claims are missing the point.

"The government does not have to be the actual and physical organizer of ethnic hatred and violence in the country while still being responsible for it," he maintains.

He argues that both Gruevski and his Albanian coalition partner, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, have nurtured nationalist resentment amongst their supporters - while at the same time happily sharing the spoils of government office.



Police have been seizing weapons off the streets of Skopje.

New Street Battle Splits Macedonia's Capital

A bid to rename hundreds of streets is stirring a heated ideological and ethnic debate in Skopje.



By Sinisa Jakov Marusic

For the first time in the two decades that have passed since Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia, the capital is getting ready for mass changes in the names of its streets.

On Monday the city council of Skopje, working behind closed doors, approved some 240 new street names proposed by the ruling centre-right VMRO DPMNE and its ethnic Albanian junior partner, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI.

Officials from both parties say that a list of about 1,000 new names is in the pipeline.

While the ruling parties, holding a majority on the city council, justify the move by appealing to a need to reflect the reality of Macedonia's statehood, others are deeply concerned.

The main opposition Social Democrats say they suspect that the move forms part of a bid to write off important figures linked with Yugoslavia's anti-Fascist wartime struggle and subsequent Communist history - and replace them with controversial names that fit the ruling party's nationalist ideology.

An additional, separate controversy concerns the battle to include names drawn from the Albanian community, who make up about a quarter of the country's population as well as about a quarter of the population of Skopje.

The inclusion of their heroes may prove most problematic of all as a little more than a decade ago, in 2001, the country saw a short but bloody armed conflict between Macedonians and Albanian rebels.

As the bidding for new names heats up, observers urge caution, arguing that too much ethnic and ideological bickering over street names could lead Macedonia into uncharted territory.

But government officials say something has to change.

"Many streets in Skopje were named after people or events steaming from the old Communist ideology," one VMRO DPMNE member of the city council told Prishtina Insight.

"There is no point in honoring bureaucrats from the past regime and with this move we aim to change that."

The official did not wish to give his name, partly because the ruling party has not clarified its position on the future renaming of the streets.

One novelty in the proposals is the inclusion of figures from the Classical Antiquity - all designed to fit the government ideology that today's Macedonians are the heirs to Alexander the Great.

They want streets and boulevards named

after the ancient warrior king as well as after his father, Philip.

Although last year's decision to erect a giant statue of Alexander in Skopje angered neighbouring Greece, which says Alexander is an exclusively Hellenic figure, the VMRO DPMNE government of Nikola Gruevski still insists that he belongs in Macedonia's own pantheon and thus deserves a street or two.

Another novelty is the inclusion of names of 19th and 20th-century nationalists who in the Communist era were denounced as reactionary servants of foreign interests.

Such figures include Todor Aleksandrov or Vanco Mihajlov, both members of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, VMRO, which fought for Macedonia's independence from Ottoman rule but was in some periods closely linked to Bulgaria.

Both were previously considered too pro-Bulgarian in their beliefs and thus undeserving of hero status.

Interestingly, while the ruling party has not forgotten to include one former Macedonian Communist leader, Krste Crvenkovski, it also wants a street named "Victims of Communism".

None of that is music to the ears of the Social Democrats, the party seen as the direct successor to the old League of Communists of Macedonia.

They fear that the renaming process forms part of an agenda to create a different national identity for Macedonia, which includes discrediting important figures from the past who made a real contribution to the country.

"Important elements of Macedonia's statehood are being put into direct question," Gordan Georgiev, vice president of the Social Democrats, complains.

"The ruling parties have an obligation to respect the deeds of historic figures who contributed to the formation of the Macedonian state," he adds.

This party says now is not the right time to draw up new street names en masse, and it charges VMRO DPMNE with being too secretive about the entire operation. As an alternative, the party proposes that all new names be put to a referendum.

The last attempt to rename some 40 streets in Skopje in 1993, shortly after Macedonia became independent, ended in fiasco when the Constitutional Court annulled this move, citing procedural errors.

As a result, Skopje's central square, which then was renamed "Macedonia Square", is still formally named after the former Yugoslav leader, Marshal Tito.

So is Macedonia's main street, which people now call "Macedonia Street" but is officially still listed as "Marshal Tito Street".

Apart from the ideological clash between the two main parties, the announcement that Albanian heroes will be included has triggered additional controversy.



A row has erupted over plans to rename streets in Skopje.

In a recent interview for the daily newspaper Dnevnik, the DUI vice-president, Izet Mexiti, revealed that his party has already made a "gentlemen's deal" with VMRO DPMNE concerning the inclusion of Albanian heroes.

Streets named after the 15th-century Albanian warrior George Kastrioti Skanderbeg, the prize-winning writer Ismail Kadare, former Albanian Prime Minister Hasan Prishtina and the 19th-century Albanian revolutionary Dervish Cara are thus likely to be approved by the city council, sources told Prishtina Insight.

There have also been proposals to name streets after the Albanian capital, Tirana, and the Kosovo capital, Prishtina.

But VMRO DPMNE remains cagy about the terms of the deal, which could yet unravel.

Macedonia saw an armed conflict between Albanian insurgents and Macedonian security forces in 2001. The conflict ended the same year with a peace accord that guaranteed greater rights to Albanians and amnesty for the Albanian fighters. But the whole issue remains controversial and sensitive.

According to Mexiti, one of the main points of the deal was that both parties have agreed not to propose names that might irritate the other side.

This includes names of fighters, or soldiers, killed in the 2001 conflict who may be martyrs in the eyes of one community and terrorists in the eyes of the other.

Neither war veteran organization is happy with that announced compromise as both ethnic Macedonian and Albanian veterans think their heroes are being unjustly omitted.

"The deal between VMRO DPMNE and DUI is shameful because it puts us in the same basket as the NLA," Zvonko

Trencevski, head of the Dostoinstvo [Dignity] veterans association, said, referring to the National Liberation Army, the armed formation of the former Albanian rebels.

Trencevski says it is wrong to equate former rebel paramilitaries with the security forces of the state.

The small rightist opposition VMRO-People's Party holds the same line. It recently proposed 58 street names, honouring Macedonian war veterans killed in the conflict in 2001.

But Besim Hoda, from the Association of Albanian War Veterans, says his people want their version of the struggle commemorated.

"Our struggle was for the improvement of the position of the Albanians, not for street names," he says. "But it would only be fair if our killed fighters got their own monument in Skopje as the Macedonian veterans did last year."

They, too, have supporters on the city council. The ethnic Albanian opposition Democratic Party of Albanians, DPA, has included names of dead Albanian fighters in its own proposals.

Meanwhile scholars advise caution. Violeta Ackovska, history professor at Skopje University, says changing street names is a natural process that must be handled with delicacy.

"Unlike some countries like Britain, which have not changed their political system for centuries, history in the Balkans is turbulent and each change in the political system brings its own heroes," she notes.

She argues that a consensus needs to be reached that a person chosen for the honor of having his or her street has played a positive role in the country's history.

"One needs to be very careful" she says.

Question Mark Hangs over Nigeria, Uganda Recognitions

The recognition of Kosovo's independence by Nigeria and Uganda remain unconfirmed, months after they were announced by Deputy PM Behgjet Pacolli.

Pacolli, who has been touring African states seeking recognitions, announced the diplomatic successes following official notes from the presidents of both countries.

But Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has yet to receive the "verbal note", which indicates the formal establishment of diplomatic relations.

Officials from the MFA told Prishtina

Insight that "the verbal notes are pending".

Opposition politicians have said that Pacolli's announcements were "frivolous" and risked angering countries which were about to recognise Kosovo.

While on the MFA's website there are 88 countries listed as having recognised Kosovo's independence, at the last meeting of UN's Security Council the figure was put

at 85.

Vjosa Osmani, member of the opposition LDK party and former advisor to ex-president Fatmir Sejdiu, said: "This is contrary to diplomatic practice and can irritate these states, who perhaps are truly willing to recognise us."

Jetlir Zyberaj, advisor to Pacolli, said that the MFA was misinformed about the verbal

notes, but he was unable to provide copies of them to Prishtina Insight.

"What I can tell you is that we as an office have good cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. With this cooperation, we consistently redirect all correspondence with the countries of the world, with which we work for the recognition the Republic of Kosovo," he added.

Albania's Nationalists Corner

Graffiti in most countries is part of the artistic weaponry of the rebellious, leftwing counter-culture – but not in Albania, where so far it's mainly being used to send nationalist messages.



By Marjola Rukaj

Beso and Sane are graffiti artists from Albania. Both returned home after many years spent studying and living abroad.

But there is a significant difference between them, for Beso uses graffiti to express nationalist viewpoints while Sane paints weird-looking creatures and believes art has a social and political context.

Graffiti artists are a new phenomenon in Albania. But in the last few years their work has started penetrating Albania's urban milieu, especially the cities of Durres and Tirana.

Most graffiti artwork in Albania so far has been done for "Tifozat Kuq e Zi" ("Red and Black"), a nationalist group.

It seems like a bid by the group to make itself look more attractive to the kinds of youngsters who like graffiti and hip hop.

Other than that, Albanian graffiti rarely have much of a political or social message.



Graffiti by the Albanian football supporters - Kuq e Zi - often has a nationalist flavour. "It's good to be an Albanian," reads the graffiti.

Hip hop or nationalism:

Beso, one of Albania's best-known graffiti artists, grew up in Rome, where he studied law.

Part of a multi-cultural graffiti group in Rome, he belonged to various subculture communities and centres before moving back to Tirana recently.

"In Rome I learned that I could

live everywhere. But I am Illyrian, Tirana is my home, so I came back," he explains.

Concerning his graffiti, he expresses a very different point of view from that of the Roman communities of which he was once part, which tend to espouse typical hard-left views.

"I'm out of politics but I somehow do politics with my graffiti.

I'm a nationalist and want to support Albanian nationalism," he told Prishtina Insight.

One of the Tifozat Kuq e Zi members that didn't want to be named said "We spread our messages through graffiti tags. At the beginning there was just Beso and few other boys, but now there are many of them".

He adds that the most common

graffiti are maps of ethnic, or greater, Albania, and accompanying similar slogans.

But not all graffiti makers are part of the nationalist movement. Some feel more part of the hip-hop world and use their art to express feelings of rebellion.

One teenage graffiti writer from Kukës who works under the name of Crime Game says he learned his

Schengen Red Light Leaves Romania

Despite strenuous diplomatic efforts, Bucharest again failed to secure entry into the passport-free zone, leaving Romanians wondering who is to blame – Brussels or their own leaders?



By Marian Chiriac

International relations are often likened to a complex game of chess. Players move their pawns in one direction so that their bishops or queens can move in another - and clinch a surprise victory.

Romanian officials have been playing their own diplomatic chess game lately - but if there is a grand strategy, no one can quite work out what it is.

At a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels on February 28, Romania unexpectedly held up an agreement on awarding Serbia EU candidate status, annoying the other diplomats present.

Bucharest queried the decision on Serbia, demanding fresh guarantees concerning the rights of Serbia's Vlach minority, an ethnic minority group who speak a Romance language and who are considered by Bucharest as ethnic

Romanians.

"Romania is not trying to veto Serbia's candidacy but we do want to stand in defence of minority rights in the Western Balkans," Foreign Minister Cristian Diaconescu claimed.

Two days later Romania withdrew its veto after both countries signed a protocol on minority rights, beefing up protection of the 40,000-strong Vlach community, only some of whom consider themselves Romanian. (Others think of themselves as Serbs).

Belgrade finally clinched its coveted status as an EU candidate country on Thursday night.

Romania's opposition to Serbia came as a surprise as the two countries are generally considered allies. Romania is one of only five EU countries that have refused to recognise Kosovo's independence.

As far as most analysts were concerned, Bucharest's motives in Brussels had little to do with the position of the Vlachs in Serbia and more to do with Romania's frustration about being excluded from the passport-free Schengen

zone.

"The decision to block Serbia's accession to the EU could be a tit-for-tat retaliation against the Netherlands for blocking its membership of the Schengen area," journalist Elena Vijulie speculated.

She recalled that Romania once threatened to stop Croatia's accession to the EU if various countries did not reconsider their opposition to Romania joining the Schengen area.

To most diplomats in Brussels, Romania's diplomatic performance was unimpressive.

"You have to be a 19th-century nationalist to believe this sort of garbage," one diplomatic source was quoted in the Economist magazine as saying, referring to Romania's sudden concern for the position of the Vlach minority in Serbia.

And while Romania was trying to score points by drawing attention to the Vlach issues, it failed to win over opponents of its entry into the passport-free Schengen area.

On February 2, the day Serbia that officially won EU candidate status, European leaders again delayed a decision about Romania's entry into the Schengen area, this time until September.

Romania and Bulgaria joined

the European Union in January 2007, had hoped to be part of Schengen by 2011. But France, Germany, Finland and The Netherlands opposed the move.

The first three countries have since dropped their opposition but the Netherlands has remained



Romanians still need a passport to travel into the Schengen zone.

Market in Graffiti

craft from a cousin abroad.

"I'm not a nationalist though I've done graffiti for Tifozat Kuq e Zi," he says. "But the main reason I do graffiti is because I'm part of the hip-hop subculture."

"Nero", a 16-year-old graffiti artist from Tirana, has other motives. "Most of us write our names everywhere. I think graffiti consists in that - the fact that I can write my name everywhere. It's an expression of my rebellion," he says.

Social context missing:

Hidden in the sea of nationalistic messages, other forms of graffiti art are to be seen, mainly the work of artists who have come back from studying abroad.

Meanwhile, Sane, one of the oldest graffiti writers in Tirana, studied art in the Netherlands, where he emigrated aged 13. He came back to Tirana three years ago, aged 25.

"I'm an artist, and graffiti is to me a technique, like any other, to express myself with," he says.

His graffiti are among the most elaborate to be seen, representing strange fantasy creatures. He has done graffiti for many of the trendiest bars and shops in Tirana.

He says he doesn't feel part of any particular subculture, and explains that in Albania the critical and social context for that is lacking.

"I don't think there is a hip hop subculture in Albania. We don't have a true 'underground' scene because we all are underground, and we're not demanding changes," he explains.

Robbery Sk, the only female graffiti artist in Albania, studied art in Florence and paints mostly in Durrës. Her graffiti are the most socially engaged ones to be seen in the country.

"To me graffiti is very direct way to communicate with the public. Graffiti should be inspired by reality, and communicate to people," she says.

Unlike most other graffiti artists, this 22-year-old takes a keen interest in Albanian politics and social problems.

She feels graffiti artists should be more



Graffiti by Crime Game

inspired by Albanian reality, and less by American movies about hip hop.

"If artists say they're not interested in social and political reality, what they're doing is just decoration, not art," she maintains.

Sofia Kalo, an Albanian scholar in Massachusetts and an expert on Albanian contemporary art, is critical of the new phenomenon in Albania.

"Most graffiti in Albania are just slogans," she says.

"Most of what graffiti writers do in Albania reflects the passivity that Albanians themselves show towards social injustice, abuse, suffering and corruption."

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

No legal problems

Sometimes graffiti are painted away by the authorities, but no graffiti artist has yet been arrested because of graffiti writing.

As graffiti are relatively new to Albania, they are not described in the Albanian penal code. Paragraph 154 on violation of property, doesn't even mention it.

"I have never had problems with the authorities though it is part of the excitement while writing. The worst that has happened to me is that people had painted my graffiti away the next day", says Beso.



Graffiti by Sane

marketing



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Frustrated

adamant, calling for more tangible progress in the fight against corruption.

In defence of their position, Dutch officials cite repeated European Commission progress reports on stalled judicial reforms and inefficient battles against corruption in both Balkan countries.

Last week, the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy did have some consolation for Romania and Bulgaria, saying the EU had made progress regarding the two countries' Schengen accession bids.

"After intensive preparatory consultations in the last weeks, we now have a roadmap," a Council press release cited him as saying.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso was equally placatory, saying that accession to Schengen was a matter of time and trust. "The time has come to lift all obstacles and this must happen soon," he said.

Despite these soothing words from key EU officials, Romania's reaction was still angry.

Speaking at the end of the two-day European Council meeting in Brussels, President Traian Basescu said Dutch opposition to Romania's accession to the border-free area was an abuse of an EU member country.

"We expect Holland to respect the EU

Treaty, we are not asking for a blank cheque," Basescu said.

Bucharest insists it now meets all the technical criteria needed to control its more than 2,000km-long border, including with non-EU countries Ukraine and Moldova.

President Basescu has crossed swords with Holland before in recent months, pointing out that Holland, not Romania, had legalised prostitution and drug use.

Reacting to Dutch worries over Romania's ability to guard the EU's borders, Basescu said in January: "The main harbour for drugs entering Europe is Rotterdam, not Constanta [on the Black Sea] or Tulcea [on the Danube River]."

Not everyone in Romania is happy with the way Romania is conducting its own particular diplomatic chess game.

"The President's remarks were inappropriate and will only worsen relations with The Netherlands and other powerful EU countries", political analyst Bogdan Chireac predicts.

"We need to understand what happened, and stop lying to ourselves that we meet the technical criteria," he adds.

"The current government and Traian Basescu have to take responsibility for the fact that Romania's Schengen entry has been delayed again."

Trailer About Tito's Space Plans Thrills Ex-Yugoslavs

The trailer for a Slovene docudrama that suggests America bought its space programme from Tito's Yugoslavia has had almost a million net views. Prishtina Insight spoke to authors Bostjan and Ziga Virc.



By Andrej Klemencic

Two young Slovenian film makers, Bostjan and Ziga Virc, have not only given a new dimension to conspiracy theories about President Tito's role in the Cold War era space race. They have also created one of the most significant Internet phenomena in years.

Judging by the immense popularity on the Internet of the trailer for their forthcoming film, hundreds of thousands of ex-Yugoslavs appear fascinated by the idea that their country played a key role in the space race – and that Americans only landed on the Moon thanks to a programme secretly purchased from what was then a Communist country.

The Virc brothers freely admit that they are combining fiction

with facts in Houston. We Have a Problem, which intends to claim that a Yugoslav space programme was sold to Washington just years before Apollo landed on the Moon.

Key "facts" behind the project are documents that testify that Yugoslavia was buying rockets from the US, the existence of an underground military base near Bihac, in northwest Bosnia, and Tito's visits to the US space agency NASA.

The authors pay particular attention to a claim that Tito received a rock from the Moon from the crew of Apollo 11.

Media in the region are having a field day guessing how much money the US might have paid for this hitherto unknown Yugoslav space programme, hosting shows where experts discuss Yugoslavia's internal issues and foreign politics at the time. The subject has also received coverage in several leading European

and American publications.

The authors insist they care little about the fuss they have generated, saying they are focusing more on collecting money for the actual film and choosing locations.

Clearly aware that the trailer has had an impact, the brothers are somewhat secretive with their answers, saying only that they hope the complete project will hit the screens in 2014.

Asked about the incredible popularity of the clip, the brothers admit it has surpassed their expectations. "We had no idea the trailer would become this popular," they say.

"We basically launched it to attract potential investors. We also had no intentions to be deliberately sensationalist. We have been developing the project carefully, step by step."

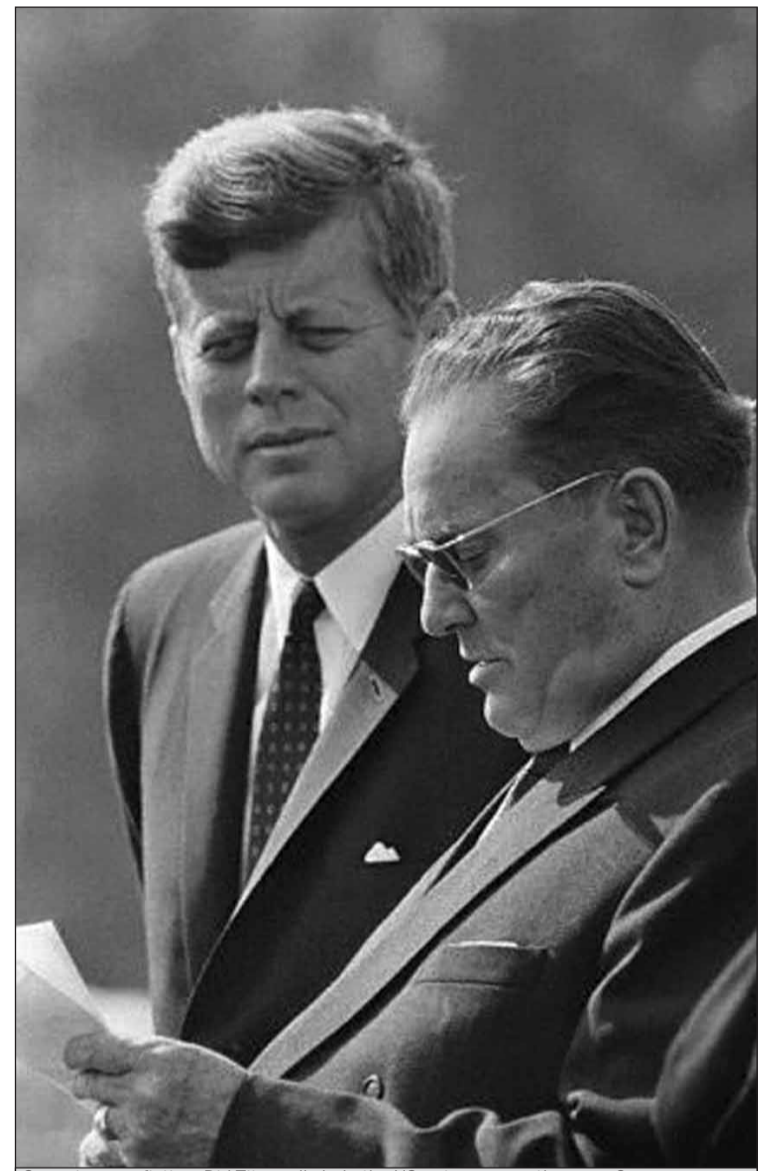
Bostjan and Ziga say the project began as something quite different. "First Ziga wrote a screenplay for a feature that was supposed to be based on explorations of the Slovene space pioneer Herman Potocnik," Bostjan said.

"We were interested in his book, *The Problem of Space Travel*, published before the Second World War, which was then taken, probably by Americans, from Potocnik's Vienna apartment in 1945. "What we wanted to do was a feature, but when we started exploring the topic, we came on so many checkable facts that we decided to do a docudrama, combining fiction with facts."

It is what the authors call their "facts" that are mostly hotly disputed by various experts.

The lawyer of Tito's heirs, Goran Petronijevic, for example, insists that no rock from the Moon is to be found in the list of President Tito's belongings.

Bozidar Spasic, from the Yugoslav secret service, also disputes the claim that the Bihac underground air base was a



Conspiracy or fiction. Did Tito really help the US put a man on the moon?

space compound.

The US space historian Bill Barry, meanwhile, says connecting up the facts about presidential visits and the arms trade in such a way as to indicate that America's space programme had its origins in Yugoslavia is to wander very far from reality.

The Virc brothers say they are not too hung up about facts, they just want to make a good film.

"At this stage of the project, it is less important if all information we believe to be facts is accurate," they say.

"We are mainly focused on making a good film. We are sure, however, that many of the facts will turn out to be true. After the trailer was released we were approached by many people, bringing valuable information."

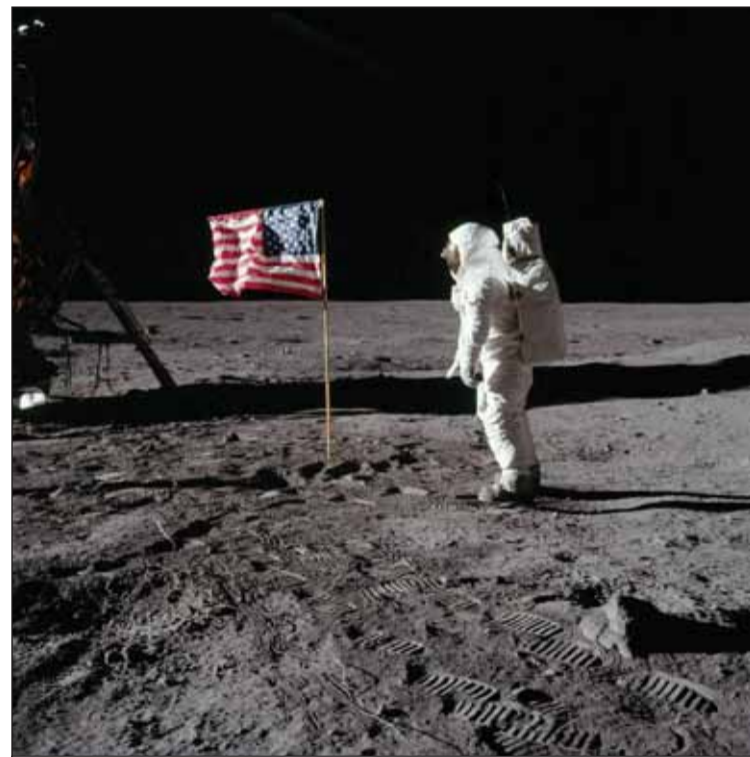
Asked to elaborate more on that point, the brothers say that more will become known when the film is released.

Despite accepting that there might well be a heavily fictional element to their work, the Virc brothers do genuinely believe that Yugoslavia had its own space programme.

"Many facts speak in favour of our claim. We can't say to what extent Tito succeeded in his space ambitions but we believe he was a mediator for joint space projects of the USSR and the US."

The authors say no clear budget outline for the film is yet in sight, but believe they will obtain support from partners in Croatia, Austria and Germany. They are also counting on Slovenian and European film funds.

The fact that Ziga was nominated in 2010 for the Honorary Foreign film Award of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for best Student Film might attract potential financiers.



A new film delves into myths around Yugoslav involvement in the moon landing.

Survey Reveals Nostalgia For Life in Old Yugoslavia

Many former Yugoslavs believe that life was better and jobs easier to get by in the old days - though Croats and Kosovo Albanians are not as nostalgic as Serbs and Bosniaks.



By Marija Ristic

A survey of attitudes towards the old Yugoslav state by the European Fund for the Balkans shows that many people - Serbs especially - look on the former socialist federation with a distinct feeling of nostalgia.

The survey included two generations of people, one group born in 1971 and the other

born in 1991, as Yugoslavia fell apart.

Apart from the younger group in Croatia and Kosovo, most of the other younger people believe life for their parents was better than their lives are today.

They also feel that there were better employment opportunities in the past than today.

In spite of this nostalgia for the former Yugoslavia, most members of both generations see the disintegration of Yugoslavia as inevitable, with the exception of the older generation of Serbs and Bosniaks.

Asked to choose between returning to the

political system of the former Yugoslavia or joining the European Union, most Serbs prefer the old Yugoslavia option.

Bosniaks and Montenegrins viewed either community equally, while citizens of Kosovo said they would prefer life in the EU.

However, the younger group in all countries believe they will get better education within the EU than their parents got under communism.

Most members of both generations say EU membership will not influence their national identity while Kosovars, Albanians and Macedonians believe their identity will

be strengthened within the EU.

Most people from both generations said contacts and good relationships with other former Yugoslav countries were important.

Levels of trust between nations, especially between those that participated in the wars of the 1990s, remain low.

People from Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia have little trust in Serbs, while Serbs and Montenegrins least trust Albanians.

Over 4,000 people from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro participated in the survey conducted in September and October 2011.

Hilltop University Threatens Ohrid's UNESCO Status

Prominent architects say plan to build a university in the heart of the town, called Plaosnik 2014, could jeopardise Ohrid's place on UNESCO's list of world heritage sites.



By Aneta Risteska

Time may be running out for the lakeside city of Ohrid to start taking due care of its outstanding cultural heritage, which contains traces of early and Medieval Christianity at every step.

The Association of Macedonian Architects warns that if a change of heart does not happen soon, the picturesque city of Byzantine churches and basilicas could risk deletion from the prestigious list of UNESCO world heritage sites.

Architects say a compromise needs to be reached concerning the conflicting demands to preserve Ohrid's authentic heritage as well as allow for its growth as a tourist resort and as a modern town.

The latest construction plan worrying them is the project dubbed Plaosnik 2014, which envisages the construction of a university complex on the hill above the old core of the city.

The university is designed to symbolise the resurrection of the old centre of Slavic literacy that once existed there in the 9th and 10th century.

The government-funded plan envisages the erection of faculties for theology and social sciences, museums, galleries, a conservation school, monuments and conference halls.

A so-called St Clement Garden, named after the Byzantine-era scholar and missionary who 11 centuries ago established the first university in this area, is to be planted in the pine forest on Plaosnik hill.

The problem is that all this is supposed to be built on top of a valuable archeological dig.

The plan is for the project, cov-

ering 7,800 m² of land, with an initial financial input of 9 million euros, to be finished by 2014.

Architects say the grand project is not aiming to reconstruct authentic buildings from the past. They say its style strays far from the town's traditional architecture and from the old Slavic church building tradition.

They say it is also unacceptable to slap futuristic structures on top of one of the country's most valued archeological sites.

Members of the association have complained before that Ohrid is being urbanized irrationally and without due consultation with architects.

In this case they argue that a location such as Plaosnik does not allow for any such urban expansion, adding that UNESCO can hardly be expected to turn a blind eye to such an intrusion.

The protesters say the authentic architecture of Ohrid will be virtually eclipsed by an estimated 20 new erections.

One prominent medieval building, the church of St Panteleimon, is in most immediate danger, they say, as according to the plans it will be surrounded by tall new buildings.

Some earlier project versions even included ultra-modern constructions built of glass and metal. However, the authorities have since opted for plans whose facades at least match Ohrid's traditional architecture.

UNESCO is already on the alert. During her visit to Macedonia last summer, General Director Irina Bokova warned that any dramatic and exaggerated alterations to the skyline could result in Ohrid's deletion from the UNESCO list.

"We should be very careful when it comes to the protection of heritage and its conservation, which is something we should work on, and maintain authenticity," she said at the time.

The head of the Cultural

Heritage Protection Office, Donka Bardzieva Trajkovska, says the location should not be treated as a free building site but as an archaeological locality, protected by law.

"We suspect that behind the 'systematic archaeological research' that is preceding construction, the terrain is being 'swept', so that room for new buildings can be created," she said.

"If electric and telecommunication installations are included, as well as the construction of additional underground structures, the collateral damage [to the site] will be irreparable," she warned.

UNESCO added Ohrid town and Lake Ohrid as cultural and then natural World Heritage Sites in 1979 and in 1980.

Ohrid is one of only 28 UNESCO World Heritage sites that are listed as both cultural and natural rarities at the same time. The list contains 936 sites in total.

Milan Gjucinov, a member of the Macedonian Academy for Sciences and Arts, MANU, who was born in Ohrid, says the government project is an enormous mistake.

"Ohrid has been gradually losing its recognizable spirit, which affects me as a citizen of Ohrid," he said. "No one consults scientific institutions for advice, nor can they influence the actions of the authorities," he added.

But Pasko Kuzman, head of the Bureau for Protection of Cultural Heritage [under the culture ministry], and one of the designers of the project, disagrees.

He told the OhridNews news portal in August 2011 that the critics had not seen the real project plans but only "its interpreted false depictions".

He says none of the planned buildings is higher than two storeys and academicians, architects, art historians and other experts have taken proper care of the design.

"The selected project envisages



Ohrid risks losing its UNESCO status

construction of buildings that completely fit into the architecture of Ohrid and the Ohrid Archbishopric in the context of sacral edifices from the 11th to 14th century, including the old city architecture still present in Ohrid," Kuzman told OhridNews.

"It all represents a symbiosis that won't disturb the ambience," he added.

He concedes that the project is not flawless but says its construction respects Macedonian and overall Slavic culture, adding that and only time will tell whether this project is justified or not.

It is also maintained that all archaeological relics uncovered during the digging at Plaosnik will be properly preserved and presented.

For now, activities are at a standstill during the harsh winter but excavation will continue afresh in spring. Tanja Paskaleva Buntasevska, director of the Office for Protection of Cultural Monuments at the Ohrid Museum, says.

Also one of the creators of the Plaosnik 2014 project, she insists that the project won't endanger Ohrid's UNESCO status.

"The constructions aren't tall and also aren't very near the church of St Panteleimon," she noted.

She also suspects that many of the critics have not seen the original project but only some inaccurate depictions in the media.

"We are putting maximum effort into protecting the terrain and more and more citizens are joining our cause," she said.

"Given that we will abide by the law, there is no danger that any excavated remains will stay unprotected," Buntasevska added.

The head of the National Commission of UNESCO in Macedonia, Lidija Topuzovska, maintains that following adoption in 2010 of a special law on management of the Ohrid Region as a world cultural and natural heritage site, and another such law in 2011, Ohrid's position on the UNESCO list should be safe.

She admits not having seen the exact architectural project for Plaosnik 2014 but believes everything will match regulations.

"In case there is any oversight we would have no excuse because we have laws in place," she said.

She suggests that what the project needs now is strong supervision and strict adherence to the law.

"It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain standards and the supervision," Topuzovska told Prishtina Insight.

The last time that UNESCO deleted a city from its list was in 2009, when Dresden was crossed off after a bridge with four lanes was built through the city's protected core.

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

Albania Blast Trial Sentences Disappoint Victims



By Besar Likmeta

Victims' families have protested against the sentences handed down by Tirana district court for the blast on March 15, 2008 in the village of Gerdec, which killed 26 people and wounded more than 300, saying they were too lenient.

Family members of the dead victims of 2008 explosions at an ammunition disposal factory that killed 26 people are seen at the Tirana district court, Albania, Monday, March 12, 2012 | AP Photo/Hektor Pustina

Families of victims of the deadly Gerdec blast in March 2008

expressed disappointment after a court in Tirana jailed Dritan Minxholi, manager of the munitions demolition plant, for 18 years.

It also jailed the former head of Albania's arms exports agency, Ylli Pinari, for 18 years while Mihal Delijorgji, owner of Alba-Demil, the firm managing the plant, will serve ten years behind bars.

The court sentenced Albania's former army chief-of-staff, Luan Hoxha, to six years in prison.

The explosion ripped through a former army barracks used as a collection point for old Chinese and Soviet-made shells that a local company was demilitarizing to extract the metal.

According to prosecutors, the

explosion occurred after workers, often untrained and low-paid women and children, tried to weld several metal carriages used to transport heavy munitions, close to containers filled with explosives.

Immediately after the explosion it emerged that Alba-Demil, the company that ran the factory, blatantly disregarded safety rules. The investigation led to criminal charges being filed against 29 people, ranging from abuse of power to murder. Prosecutors had sought a life sentence for all three, who were accused of murder.

The families of victims who were present during the trial issued a statement condemning the sentences as too light and complaining that justice had not been



The scene of the devastating blast in Gerdec.

done.

"Everybody can kill today in Albania for greed, because this precedent shows that they won't receive the proper sentence," the statement said.

"With this verdict justice not only was late in coming but it has also failed to deliver," the same statement added.

The Tirana court issued guilty

verdicts for 19 defendants, including company officials, of imprisonment between one and 18 years on charges of gross mismanagement and other related offenses. The series of explosions on March 15, 2008 at the disposal factory in Gerdec, near Tirana killed 26 people, left 5,500 nearby homes damaged or destroyed, and also injured 302 people.

Where to pick up Prishtina Insight?

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

A taste of Napoli in Prishtina.

After ten years of making pizza in Napoli, and only with love to blame, Fatmir the chef returned to Prishtina. His pizzas, made in a woodburn stove, are definitely genuine napolitanas.

For those who consider pizza to be boring, Fatmir has several pastas on offer, also a true joy for the taste buds. Napoli has an excellent selection of red and white wines or, for the more ambitious, one of the region's best quince raki. Napoli makes for delicious lunch, dinner or even after-theatre time out in the centre of Prishtina.



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

Hotel Prishtina

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

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



Hotel AFA

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

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



Te Komiteti

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

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



Restorant Brasserie Lura

At 450-metres squared 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 of 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 stews at night.

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

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

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





Alvin and the Chipmunks

Every day at 4 pm

Kino ABC continues screening the movie "Alvin and the Chipmunks" by the director Tim Hill.

In a tree farm, three musically 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 human and chipmunks make a pact for them to sing his songs. While that ambition proves a frustrating struggle with the difficult trio, the dream does come true after all.

However, that success presents its own trials 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 glamor around them?



Take Me Home Tonight

Every day at 6 pm, 8 pm and 10 pm.

ABC Cinema has started screening the 2011 movie Take Me Home Tonight by the director Michael Dowse, starring Topher Grace, Anna Faris and Dan Fogler.

It's the late 1980s, when Wall Street is riding high, and it seems as if the entire country is cashing in on bumper profits.

Disgusted with the materialism that surrounds him, Matt Franklin, a brilliant young MIT graduate, has walked out on his well-paid position at a local lab and taken a low-level job as a video clerk, much to his father Bill's consternation. And the crises keep piling up in Matt's life. His best buddy Barry has just been fired from his job, his brainy sister Wendy is getting hitched to her vapid boyfriend Kyle, and the gorgeous Tori Frederking, long-time object of Matt's unattainable adoration, is suddenly back in the picture. Now, on one wild, woolly and irresponsible evening, everything is coming to a head, with explosive results.



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

Oda Theatre

Every Tuesday at 8 pm

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 Mojito?"; "How did Gani experience his 21st snow?"; "Is Vukashin really Ukshin?"; "Does KFOR-ja 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.

If It Was a Play

Friday, March 16, 2012
At 8pm

Based on the drama by Almir Imshireviq. Director: Agon Myftari.

On bus number 4, during wartime in Prishtina, a 26 years old, wearing jeans, is near hotel Union, when a sniper bullet breaks the glass and shoots the youngster in the neck. A lady wearing white, who was next to him starts to scream. When she sees the blood in her shirt she faints. Two hours later she is seen again at the Great Mosque, near cafe "Romantika", but this time in the company of a younger friend who tells her "I sometimes do it even fourteen times!"

Starring Rebeka Qena, Adrian Morina, Armend Ismajli, Besnik Krapi.

For more information call +381 (0)38 246 555 or write oda@teatrioda.com.



Dodona Theatre

Every Thursday 7.30pm

Çifti i Hapur is being staged with the text of Italian authors Dario Fo and Franca Rame, directed by Kushtrim Koliqi

A man proposes to his wife to eliminate the concept of marital loyalty and create an "open relationship" in their lives. The woman rejects this and after several attempts at suicide, she decides to accept her husband's offer because 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 Sllamniku; **Costumes and the setting:** Njomza Luci. **Composer:** Trimir Dhomi;

For more details email teatridodona@yahoo.com; besart.sll@gmail.com



Ismet Jonuzi

"Nga vija te forma"

17.02.12 — 17.03.12

Kuruar nga
Eqrem Basha
Galeria e Arteve
e Kosovës



Valdete Veliu

Vuçitërna

"Transformim i shumëfishuar"

22.02.12 — 22.03.12

Kuruar nga
Zeni Ballazhi
Galeria e Arteve
e Kosovës



PRISHTINA DIARY

FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 2012
Hamam Jazz Bar, 9 pm
Oscar Salas Quartet
For reservation call +377 (0) 44 222 289 or +381 (0) 38 222 289
Te Veni, 9 pm
With the winner of The Voice of Albania 2012 Rina Bilurdagu and Visar Kuqi
For reservation call +377 (0) 45 361 210
Hardrockers Club, 9 pm
Hyperclown with Etrit Haxhiu - vocals/guitar, Astrit Abrashi - Lead guitar, Shpetim Smolica - Bass, Erin Godanci - Drums

SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 2012
Hamam Jazz Bar, 9 pm
Nicolas Cante concert
Nicolas Cante (FR) performs a blend of jazz, pop, techno, and electro-acoustic with his piano.
For reservation call +377 (0) 44 222 289 or +381 (0) 38 222 289
Te Veni, 9 pm
Live weekend with Pentagrami & Anita Ahmeti
For reservation call +377 (0) 45 361 210

Kosovo Museum under Investigation

Prosecutors are investigating whether 500,000 euro provided to Kosovo's national museum has been misused, Prishtina Insight has learnt.



By Lulzim Ahmeti

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports suspects that funds from five projects carried out by the museum were misused.

The State Prosecution has confirmed that it is investigating the matter.

The most serious charges relate to the fact that the museum failed to send bills for expenses, have made allegedly suspicious contracts for services and had spent money earmarked for capital investments on subsidies.

Liridona Kozmaqi, spokeswoman for the state prosecution, confirmed that the museum was being probed.

In 2010, the museum received 500,000 euro from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports for five projects, including the digitalisation of music.

Shasivar Haxhijaj, adviser to the Minister of Culture Youth and Sports, said that the funds were provided on the basis of a memorandum signed between the two institutions.

But the ministry believes that in all these projects, funds have been misused.

"We have had our suspicions that these funds have not been used appropriately, and for which they were intended," said Haxhijaj.

He added that the ministry has sought a special audit by the Office of the Auditor General of Kosovo.

According to him, appropriate measures will be taken depending on the contents of the report.

"Reporting on the 500,000 euro has not been done properly", said Haxhijaj.

An internal audit, carried out for the Museum of Kosovo, in 2010, which Prishtina Insight has seen, reveals several problems with accounting process.

According to the audit, the museum provided a financial report without "invoices and other evidence of expenditure", and diverted funds to other projects.

Auditor finds Irregularities

Auditor General Lage Olofsson said that an earlier audit had find irregularities in accounting practices at the Museum but he said that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to manage its finances well. His organisation, he said, will not be provided a special audit, as requested.

"They [The Ministry] should have agreements with culture institutions of what shall be done and how they should report.

"They should control the use of the subsidies - this is responsibility of the ministry and the ministry should also should assist them with the internal audit."

He said that it is very clear that the ministry has a responsibility to take this matter to the prosecution if it believes there have been irregularities, but it was not the Office of the Auditor General's job to provide special audits.

"When it comes to my responsibility: my responsibility is to audit the MYCS [Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport] and how their public financial system work in practice. This we have started, as every year, in September and it will end in June.

"During this process under the interim audit, we of course recognised that there



was a problem in the MYCS, that they are not pleased with the way the Museum has reported one year ago, and that they didn't give any new project subsidies for 2011."

But he said that he had refused to carry out a special audit of the museum as that was the responsibility of the ministry.

He said that what was needed was a better framework for the relationship between the ministry and cultural institutions, something he had lobbied for in 2010.

"What we have done earlier, in 2010 I think, is presented a memo to the MYCS and Ministry of Finance and we had a discussion all three together about the need to have much healthier relations between the MYCS and culture institutions.

"The whole set-up of the culture sectors is based on a legal framework that is very inconsistent, not up-dated at all, and which has clear contradictions between the established laws for the culture institutions, the general law on cultural institutions, the law on public financial management, so the whole situation is very shady," he said.

This memo also revealed a number of shortcomings in how the museum and the ministry handled their businesses.

He said: "When we were looking at the museum we saw that there a number of the shortcomings on how the MYSC treated these things, we noticed procedures related to the way subsidies should be used and spent which were unclear, we saw that transfers were made between different categories within the ministry going outside of the normal responsibilities, [we saw] shortcoming in the follow-up and monitoring of the projects.

"When it comes to the reporting from the Museum, we think that this should be developed to secure trust," he added.

"We saw a number of discrepancies when it comes to evidence of the payments, we saw that the use of services contracts leaves doubt about whether the money goes to third actors, a lack of clarity on reporting," he said. "All these things we have reported to the minister."

Director of the museum Arber Hadri says the matter was closed eight months. "When the auditor's report comes out we can talk

about this issue," he said.

Hadri insists that the relations between him and the ministry "are good".

marketing



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Inside Prishtina

Abeja: Half a Century Grooming Prishtina

In his 50 years tending to Prishtina's hair, Abeja has mastered styles ranging from "punk" to "Tarzan", coiffured three generations of the same family and picked up 300 God children.



By Korab Basha



By Meti Hajrullahu

Abeja – arguably Prishtina's best known hairdresser – has mastered all the styles in his five decades of scissor-based artisanry. Tarzan, Italian, punk – he has been asked to recreate all the weird and wonderful follicular trends of the past half century, he told Prishtina Insight.

Only a few in Prishtina don't know his barber shop Moda in Dragodan, which he opened in 1979 by popular demand.

Among those regulars who come to be groomed, shaved and trimmed are football legend Fadil Vokrri.

Most know him as "Abeja" – which means Uncle in Albanian but is also used as a term of affection – but his real name is Bahtir Berisha.

It was in 1963 that Abeja first tried his hand at a shop owned by Jusuf Gjilangjia. Barbers were not common then and Prishtina was home to just five in total.

"My father liked to take me to the barber. Jusuf, who owned the shop at the JNA road, was a friend of his and there is where I learned the artisanry of a barber for five years," Abeja said.

"Then I left for the military in Split, Croatia. When I came back I worked where the statue of Skenderbeg is, near the National Theatre."

His father's suggestion then became his profession and his passion throughout the years.

"It was different back then," said Abeja. "You had to wake up early. At 6am people left for work and came by to get shaven and left for work clean, unlike now."

"We had to open our shop early so that we could prepare the equipment beforehand. And we sharp-

ened the blades as we had no razors then."

Abeja is well known for his neat shop and pristine appearance – he always wears a tie. "Us artisans had to set an example back then," he said.

In 1979 he opened his first shop Moda, which means fashion. It was easy to decide the name of the shop as Abeja had become famous for trendy hairstyles over the years.

"I started on my own, and then later on my kids would come after school. So today they have their own apprenticeships."

"I have three boys who also work in this artisanry and now even my nephews have begun to take up the art of being a barber," says Abeja.

Their shops are now scattered throughout the city and Abeja's family has become synonymous with barbers.

Abeja has seen many changes over the years. Customers once came to him with a single request – to dye their hair with an oil that was known as "QiqkovoUlje".

"There was a time when no one left the shop without this oil," said Abeja. "While we shaved them, we would write up the haircuts that would be paid at the end of the month."

He revealed that he has also cut the hair for three generations of the same family. "I shaved the head of the house, he brought his son and he brought his son. I am the godfather of 300 children who have had their hair cut for the first time by me," he said.

During Abeja's time he has seen punk hairstyles, "Italian" and "Medium" cuts. "I have shaved many politicians, now quite a lot of internationals as well," he said. One famous customer of his is the celebrated football player, Fadil Vokrri, who was known for his hair long.

The Youngsters once preferred hair in the style of "Tarzan",

sometimes culled a mullet". "There weren't a lot of barbers who knew how to cut this style," he added.

"If that time were to return, half of the barbers today would drop their job because they do not know nor can finish these hairstyles off," he said. "Neither do they know how to shave with blades or how to sharpen them."

Abeja is nearing his 65 birthday. He still has a few old customers that he grooms and shaves, but the majority is done by his sons today.

Now he spends most of his time with his nephews, taking walks and following his religion, Islam.

Abeja says that his children have it easier. "Back then, working with scissors in order for you to build up a hairstyle was very difficult, now it is easier with an electric machine, all you have to do is set it to one or two depending on the length."

For Abeja, hairdressing remains an art.

Prishtina through the Eyes of:

Charly Loufrani, a Journalist at ZFD Forum in Kosovo.



What surprised you most about Prishtina?
There is always something going on.

What's your favorite hangout?
I like Tingell Tangell and Dit'e Nat, but I'm also a usual customer at Tirona and Martini. And Road 66 is great for hangover food.

Do you do anything cultural?
Yes! I'm learning to play Çiftelia! I usually like the exhibitions in Tetris, The Alternative Cultural Center in Gracanica is also a great place.

What is the most annoying thing about Prishtina?
The smell of burning coal in winter

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

I would like to start a large building insulation campaign. It could create jobs, and people could save energy and stop having these insanely expensive heating costs in winter.

How many macchiatos do you drink a day?
I can drink 6 or 7 in a good day...

What's the tastiest Kosovar food?
Fresh grilled trout, definitely! Then, tava, and homemade ajvar, of course.

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

Spring in Your Step

Prishtina's alfresco cafes have sprung back to life after one of the coldest winters in three decades. Temperatures are expected to reach a balmy 16 degrees this weekend as spring sets in.



By Beta

Macedonian Salad Needs a Fresh Start

Our response to the recent rise in ethnic tensions must involve rediscovering part of what we really are.



By Igor Stefanovski

In certain parts of the world, particularly in the Mediterranean and in South America, the name Macedonia conjures up images of a mixed fruit salad (Macedonia de frutas), not of our region, or of Alexander the Great, or the problems regarding the name of our country.

Thus, when I tell an Italian, Frenchman or Mexican that I am from Macedonia, within 10 seconds they tell me what the word means in their language. I then explain that this is so because many different nations/cultures lived/live relatively successfully in the region called Macedonia. They smile and say "You learn something new every day, right?"

Right. Life would be very tedious without some form of new information every day. But unfortunately, in Macedonia, we've been hearing the same old things in recent years; a broken record, as the English would say: "You have to change your name before anything else"... "Tomorrow there will be inter-ethnic war"... "Growing misery"... "This is not going to end well"...

Meanwhile, the political parties, who are well aware that this situation of a frightened, repressed people suits their purposes, blame one another, using the exact same vocabulary. In so doing they only serve to strengthen their own power and image as the only saviours.

Where has it brought us, the citizens of Macedonia? To a situation of good guys and bad guys, patriots and traitors, war and peace - of everything being black or white. A blood feud lasting ad infinitum. Worse, it appears that there is no escape, no light at the end of the tunnel, while the darkness continues to deepen, even though we always say that it cannot get worse.

So, where is salvation and does it exist? Yes it does. As the saying goes, it's darkest before dawn. Then where should we look for this salvation? Within ourselves, of course. But whose example should we follow?

Seeing that we are striving to enter the European Union, perhaps we should start there. Unfortunately, however, we have been looking for salvation in a model on the other side of the Atlantic. In fact, one of Macedonia's biggest problems is the fact that it is following this model even though it is one of the oldest parts of Europe. Consequently, it is now a country where workers are treated like tools rather than human beings; a country that until recently had no law on minimum wage (like the



Macedonian salads come in many forms.

US until two years ago), and has become a so-called democratic-Christian state [as VMRO-DPMNE describe themselves] in a multi-religious/cultural/ethnic land. Herein, arguably, lie the roots of the many internal problems.

On the other hand, here on the old continent, things are different. If we take a look at some countries in the European Union, we have Finland and Denmark, where over 85 per cent of workers are members of unions (as opposed to 12 per cent in the US). Then there is Sweden, a country with one of the best administrative and health systems on the planet. In fact, 19 European countries are ranked higher than the US on the global list of life expectancy. We also find the example of Belgium, which, due to inter-ethnic problems between the Flemish and the Walloons, preferred to spend 541 days without a government rather than bowing to extremist calls for disintegration.

Furthermore, in one EU country prostitution is legal, and this is not in some grey and dubious Eastern European member states, but in The Netherlands, one of the six founders of the European Union! The Dutch police also do not enforce the laws against marijuana (thus resulting in de facto legalisation), and all varieties of the "herb" are sold in so-called "coffee shops" right next to police stations, while prostitutes work wall to wall with expensive law firms. But visitors to The Netherlands do not find a land full of junkies and syringes lying on the street. It is a civilised country where the authorities have simply concluded that criminalising certain human "needs" does more harm than good.

So, why not accept these open and liberal sides of Europe? Why did we not embrace the European form of capitalism, which we had to some extent under Yugoslavia (with a strong national health system, unions, protected workers' rights), instead of allowing this merciless US version to take over?

We should look to Europe, not across the ocean, for inspiration.

Have we not had enough of Hollywood-style choreographed inter-ethnic fights on Skopje's Kale Fortress, or broadcasts modelling themselves on America's Fox News, which set out to maintain fear and convince us that our neighbour is to blame for our situation?

We need a fresh start. We need a new future in which we will not be held hostage by the current impasse, a future in which we will say, "Let's try something new, something different!" Let us adopt some of the liberal, humane policies that are working well in the states of the club that we want to join, because clearly the ones we have employed thus far have not worked.

And there is so much to choose from in the European Union: From the United Kingdom, which has the highest number of interracial marriages, we can take the example of interethnic coexis-

tence; from Sweden, we can borrow the model of the welfare state; from France, the conviction that the people are stronger than the government; and from Portugal, the de-criminalisation of all drugs (which Time and Forbes magazines assessed as a success since it halved the number of drug addicts and gave the police more time to chase real criminals instead of beating up teenagers in parks).

We need something radical but positive. We need something unifying, but not the kind of unity that arises from tragedy. We need civic action that will prove to our politicians that we are stronger than they are and will make it clear that they have gone too far with their games and manipulation. Something to show them that we hold the power. That they are nothing without us.

One of the most inspiring acts of people power that I am aware of is the Baltic Human Chain that was made between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on 23 August 1989, when 2 million people, organising themselves without the use of the Internet and mobile phones, held hands over 600 kilometres. In doing so, they let the government in Moscow know that they wanted freedom, democracy and a peaceful split from the Soviet Union, while at the same time they attracted global attention. Perhaps most importantly, they showed an unshakable solidarity existed between the peoples of the three countries.

Just imagine a column made up of Albanians, Vlachs, Macedonians, Roma, Serbs, Turks, all holding hands from St

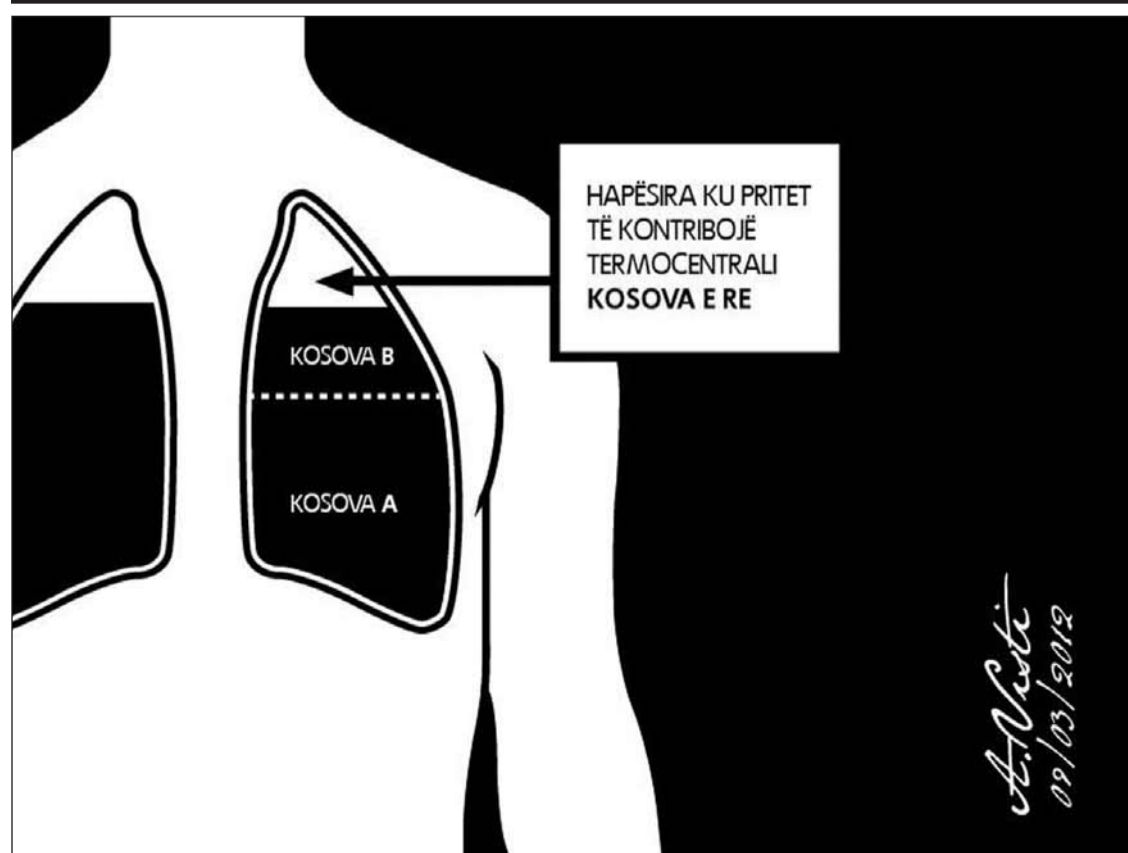
Naum to Kriva Palanka, via Skopje, in the middle of a working day. It worked in the Baltics, so why not the Balkans? After something like that, I doubt we would believe in the choreographed, farcical politics we have here, or in those who orchestrate them.

I look forward to the day when we accept that living in this country requires interethnic coexistence. The day when we realise that the fact that Macedonia also means a mixed fruit salad is something that we should be proud of, because there is nothing better than a freshly made fruit salad. Unfortunately, the fruit salad that is currently on offer is far from appealing. We do not want to see it, let alone eat it. Fortunately for us, the best fruit grows right here, on Macedonian soil! We just need to choose the best and ripest crop, wash it and slice it, and then mix it together by following an old country recipe.

According to Wikipedia (Macedonia-food), our name was popularised as a reference to fruit salad in the late 18th century, alluding to the various peoples who lived in Alexander the Great's empire (as well as the Ottoman one). If we really want that name for our country, why not try to maintain one of the meanings that it has worldwide? I await the day when we bring out our best fresh fruit and present to the world the spectacular brand that is Macedonia!

Igor Stefanovski is a graduate of the Master's programme at the Institut Européen des Hautes Etudes Internationales.

Space allocated for the New Kosovo power plant.



Has Serbia Made up Its Mind at Last?

By obtaining EU candidate status, Serbia has sent an important signal - but the real test will be the membership negotiations, as they will require a deeper transformation of society, writes Sonja Biserko, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Serbia.



By Sonja Biserko

By meeting the conditions for EU candidate status, Serbia has at last defined its strategic orientation after nearly three decades. Being granted official candidate status is the beginning of the end of a policy that brought Serbia to a dead end and total isolation.

This policy was the result of Serbia's failure to come to terms with the new international conditions that set in during 1989-91. Serbia misinterpreted them as an opportunity, as it could not gain mastery of Yugoslavia, to reorganize the Balkans to its liking. Although this seemed possible in the 1990s, it has proven unrealistic. Ever since, the international community has been working to cut Serbia down to size, something Serbia has resisted even since the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic.

It took time for the international community to realize that a portion of the new democratic government continued to pursue the old Milosevic policies with "other means". Zoran Djindjic and the small circle around him tried to reorient Serbia towards the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration. But, unfortunately, he was killed for his efforts. An anti-European current took over following his assassination, halting or slowing Serbia's march towards European integration.

It was not until the 2008 elections that a pro-European government came to power and signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement. Consequently, it adopted a series of pro-European laws, set up a variety of independent bodies and announced its priorities. These included the fight against corruption and organized crime, extraditing persons charged by the Hague tribunal and other steps.

But little of this has been achieved. The elites are still dominated by an anti-European current, bent on preserving the status quo at any cost. Besides, Serbia faces serious problems. The country's political and social transformation is still incomplete, demographic trends are worrying, young and educated people are still leaving the country, judicial reform still leaves much to be desired, and everyday life is dominated by violence and social pathology.

A lack of human potential for change has caused Serbia to stagnate and had led it to the brink of regression. This is not only due to the international economic and financial crisis but, above all, to incompetence and lack of political will to reorient the country towards reforms. This is why Serbia needs the European Union.

The whole of 2011 passed in efforts to effect a partition of Kosovo and Bosnia, destabilize Montenegro and prevent Serbia's own northern province of Vojvodina from obtaining autonomy.

Russia's support and encouragement, which featured prominently on the Serbian political scene throughout the year, was of crucial importance.

But the activism of the anti-European bloc at last prodded the international community, above all Germany and the United States, into action. On 9 December, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, blocked Serbia's bid for candidate status in order to round off the process of recognizing Kosovo as an independent state and thus stabilize that part of the Balkans. Although Serbian strategists had not bargained for such a counter-stroke, they have realized that the Kosovo issue is an insurmountable obstacle on the country's road to candidate status.

In the aftermath of 9 December, the anti-European bloc launched an offensive against candidate status and the EU. A leading part was played by former prime minister Vojislav Kostunica, whose book *Zasto Srbija a ne Evropska unija* (Why Serbia and not the European Union), which advocates a policy of neutrality, was widely promoted by the media. The book gives expression to the bloc's policy and relies on the ideology of Dobrica Cosic and the other academicians who are slowly departing from the stage.

The reincarnation of Kostunica reflects the depth of anti-European sentiment felt in the nation's major institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences and Arts, SANU, the Church, the army and the university. They regard official candidate status as tantamount to treason as they believe it stands in the way of the national project.

The dialogue conducted between Belgrade and Prishtina under EU supervision has rendered Belgrade more accommodating regarding the EU's demands in connection with Kosovo. This has proved enough for the EU to cut short the agony in which Serbia has found itself.

This could be said to be a strategic decision on the part of the EU. Apparently, a rational approach has prevailed in the EU's attitude: better include Serbia in the accession process than leave it outside it so that it may throw spanners in the works with Russia's support.

The agreement reached by the two sides has created the conditions for both Serbia's and Kosovo's more rapid European integration. Serbia has been rewarded with candidate status and Kosovo with talks on the Schengen visa system and the preparation of a feasibility study. This puts Kosovo on the road to the EU already travelled by other Western Balkan countries.

Meanwhile, candidate status does not guarantee a considerable increase in EU funds or a deadline for EU accession, both points on which the opposition has insisted. But it does represent an important political signal and a necessary step on the path to accession. Further, it sends a good message to foreign investors, who have all but disap-

peared from Serbia in the last two years.

By being granted candidate status Serbia will be able to finance certain projects by gaining access to two new components of pre-accession funds - for human resources development, encompassing education and social inclusion, and for agriculture and rural development support. The second component is of particular importance for Vojvodina.

Serbia now faces serious challenges because the forthcoming negotiations are much more demanding and will de facto call for a fundamental transformation of society. Following the granting of the candidate status, there is no deadline for opening negotiations: that depends on Serbia and on agreement among EU members.

This is why it is important that a date for the start of negotiations be set as soon as possible. The negotiations are a major, challenging step, necessitating serious reforms and controls and detailed negotiation of EU accession terms such as the fixing time limits to liberalize the market in certain segments and transition periods for achieving compliance with EU standards.

The lesson that arrived on the eve of being accepted for candidacy, when Romania threatened to exercise a veto (over the status of the Vlach minority in Serbia), was a reminder of the delicacy and seriousness of the process on which Serbia had embarked.

The matter of candidate status will be put to the supreme test during Serbia's forthcoming elections because Belgrade is expected not to call them in Kosovo. Fixing a date for the start of negotiations will, in all probability, depend on this. This is not a "new condition" for Serbia, as it will probably be interpreted as for public consumption; it is part of the process of normalizing relations in the region. In other words, it merely means respect for the so-called Copenhagen criteria that apply to all countries aspiring to EU membership - and this includes Serbia.

At this moment, granting candidate status is also important in view of the planning of the European Commission's budget for the next seven-year period. This means that Serbia will become a beneficiary of that budget as soon as the date for the start of negotiations is approved.

At this juncture, failure to obtain the candidate status would have put the wind in the sails of the anti-European bloc and thus have led Serbia into a new phase of uncertainty and helplessness. The forthcoming elections in Serbia will show whether the country backs opting for a pro-European orientation. The victory of such an option would certainly stabilize the situation in Serbia.

Sonja Biserko is President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Serbia.

Outside In Promaja – The Wind of Change



By Kreshnik Hoxha

In an attempt to tackle the scorching heat in the living room, my Kenyan housemate Maureen decided to open a window.

It was freezing cold outside, and a five second opening was sufficient for the alarm bells to ring in my head - what was this icy wind current? I instantaneously dashed to the window in order to block the "Great Satan" from entering our abode.

"You can get dangerously ill from that!" I yelled at Maureen.

"What? From opening windows?" she replied, confused.

I, of course, was shutting out the dreaded evil feared by all Balkan grandparents, the scapegoat for many mums of the former Yugoslavia. Yes, we were faced with Promaja. But, trying to explain that to a Kenyan proved quite tricky.

"Are you seriously telling me that fresh air can be life threatening?" quipped Maureen.

"It's Promaja from the two windows! The whole Balkans knows it!" I replied.

"Promaja? Is that the Albanian expression for a permanently paranoid group of people?" she commented, snidely.

In the eyes of the non-Balkaner this was an urban-myth-taken-out-of-proportion. In my eyes it was a matter of life or death.

Originally a Serbo-Croatian word, but also widely used locally among Kosovar Albanians alongside its standard Albanian equivalent *shkuji*, Promaja can be best described as a draft created by wind blowing through two windows. Balkan medical evidence suggests that this draft causes various illnesses such as numbness, colds, muscle stiffness and a fondness for leather jackets macho men. Allegedly, it's the silent killer of the Balkans.

"It is the Pandora's box for the Balkans" I added, tetchily, at Maureen's insults.

"It must be draft from all those bullet holes in the buildings" she retorted. "And I thought you told me that the Pandora's box was changing the borders?"

Could Pandora have had two boxes, I began to think to myself? But before I could come to a conclusion, Maureen added: "If opening windows is dangerous, then how do Balkaners cope with those scorching summers?"

I hit back: "It's two windows that cause the problem, not one."

And with a hint of victory in her smile, she said: "Actually, I'm slowly beginning to get this. It's kind of a genius idea: you Balkaners have been fighting each other far so long, maybe you could use this superstition to stop."

"What superstition?" I asked.

"Inventing a common enemy, even as bizarre as the wind, may be just what you need to unite" she said, while pushing the windows wide open.

Maybe she is right, I thought, as the icy blast started again: we would be better off focussing on what we have in common - even if it is a made-up enemy. And then my instincts kicked in, and I slammed the window shut.

Perhaps we are not quite ready to embrace Promaja as the wind of change yet?

Ecosovo

Bottle Tops for Wheelchairs



By Elizabeth Gowing

Kushtrim Ahmeti is clearly not an average guy. Indeed, the Guinness Book of Records is counting him as a candidate and in June it will be decided whether he can take his place alongside the world's longest river (yes, that's the Nile. Oh, or the Amazon; discuss), the largest rubber band ball (over 4000 kg) and the most eggs crushed with head in one minute (80, in New York). His claim to fame will be a lot more use than a four thousand kilogram ball though - he has collected 235 tonnes of plastic bottle tops. And unlike the guy who crushed all those eggs with his head, Kushtrim has broken the record with the aim of doing some good. Not only does he see his collection saving bottle tops from the garbage as a way of keeping all those rivers (Nile, Amazon, and Drini i Bardh alike) and their surrounding countryside clean, but he has been raising money through the sales of the bottle tops to a recycling company in order to buy wheelchairs for the disabled. To date he has raised money enabling him to have distributed 1180 wheelchairs.

Originally from Kosovo, Kushtrim is currently based in Turkey, but his project is now set to reach back to his homeland. By means of a connection with the Charity Club at the American University in Kosovo (AUK), bottle tops for his project are now being collected in Kosovo too,

and the wheelchairs these caps will buy are destined for Kosovan families. They are German-made wheelchairs which cost 450 euros on the market, and their transportation is being organized through the Turkish Embassy in Prishtina. It's also the Turkish Embassy who is helping to send the tops to the Muzaffer Pinarbasi Isletmeler recycling company in Izmir, as there are no companies in Kosovo who recycle this kind of plastic.

The technicalities of plastic recycling can soon get so intricate as to put one off even trying to separate your rubbish - even if we lived in a country where waste could be separately collected by municipal services. The crucial basic fact is that the type of plastic used for soft drinks bottles is different from the type of plastic used for soft drinks bottle tops, so for either to be recycled effectively they have to be processed separately. This separation is labour-intensive, so by removing the tops from the bottles yourself you are already helping the recycling chain. In fact, you may even be making it a safer place as plastic bottle tops cause accidents to recycling plant workers if the tops are inadvertently left on before the bottles are crushed under a pressure which is great enough to force off the caps, and shoot them into the faces of those nearby. Not only that, but if you remove the caps before waste plastic bottles leave your home, the people collecting the bottles for recycling (in Kosovo's case not municipal waste services but the unofficial recyclers who roam the city's skips looking for resellable scrap - Agron and his colleagues whom you may have met in previ-



ous Ecosovo articles) are able to compress the plastic and fit more into their wheelbarrows or trailers; the recycling process is thus made more efficient.

So for all kinds of reasons we should all be collecting the bottle tops and passing them on to the AUK Charity Club. As Kushtrim says, 'with this project I hope we can offer some help to our fellow citizens who have special needs, and we are contributing to creating a cleaner environment, especially bearing in mind the fact that plastic takes 400 years to decompose'.

The AUK Charity Club already have more than 80kg of bottle tops, collected by AUK students as well as private business and NGOs, and are hoping that they will soon reach the 250kg of bottle tops needed for one wheelchair. They have identified eight Kosovan families where wheelchairs are needed and their plan is to distribute

the first wheelchair/s on 7 April, though they will continue the project as long as they continue to receive bottle tops, so get unscrewing and storing those caps. Caps of any colour and any size can be collected.

For more information or to arrange delivery of bottle tops collected, you can contact the AUK Charity Club on charity-club@aukonline.org or you can bring your bottle tops to the Green Drinks organized by The Ideas Partnership on the second Thursday of every month at N'Killapa bar.

*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 theideaspartnership@gmail.com*

Ecosovo

The Seven-week Vegan

If we are worrying about greenhouse gases, then as well as thinking about our carbon footprint we should also pay attention to our methane hoof-print. Methane is a gas twenty times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere, and thus twenty times more of a risk to the climate. The largest source of human-produced methane is the breakdown of garbage in landfill, but agriculture is responsible for fourteen percent of the world's greenhouse gases - because of the belching and flatulence of ruminant animals (the average dairy cow is said to produce more than 100 litres of methane a day). We are urged to reduce our consumption of red meat, not just for the sake of our health, but the health of the ecosystem.

In fact, I've been a vegetarian almost all my life, so this is one part of the carbon emissions conversation where I can normally feel smug. Even better, I'm not even tempted by the bleeding steak or the shrivelled suxhuk, so my abstinence costs me nothing. I thought I could sit back, munching a cheese and tomato pizza, my buttered toast, or a bar of chocolate,

and feel sorry for these carnivores and all the wreckage they were creating.

Particularly in Kosovo, the connections between what you eat and where it's come from are easy to make; if you go to the market you'll see milk straight from the farm, sloshed from udder to old Coke bottles to go in your fridge. Even in the minimarket, those tough plastic bags in which fresh (pasteurised but non-UHT) milk is packaged have an udder-like feel, as they lurch in your hand. Unless you go for the fantasy blue mountains-branded imported UHT milk (or the sunrise marking the invidious imported 'milk drink' that isn't even actually milk), you can't help but be reminded of the fact that your milk (and therefore your chocolate, your cheese and your butter) are a product of those flatulent climate-bashing cows. This fact gives a hypocritical edge to my suggestion of vegetarian superiority.

But I love dairy. I love the cheese that stuffs a pite, the maze cream that the traditional peppers swim in (and yes, my busiest days are fuelled mainly by chocolate). As a vegetarian, dairy is also one of my

main sources of protein. It would be tough to give it all up, so I decided to try on a temporary basis; even that would save some methane and some small part of our climate havoc. The lingering habit of my church-going childhood is Lent - seven weeks of renouncing something before the celebrations and indulgences of Easter, so when 'fat Tuesday' - Mardi Gras - came around a few weeks ago I decided it was the opportunity to try saying goodbye to pancakes and ice-creams, gorgonzola and cafe latte, yoghurts and cheese sauces. If I found I was strong enough then my plan was to continue my abstinence for a certain number of days a week even after Easter.

So how am I getting on? How can you be a vegan in Kosovo?

A large part of my answer to that question is olive oil, which has become my new indulgence - and my skin feels better for it. (On a side note I've also learned something about the cheap olive 'pomace' oils or 'sansa di oliva' that are on sale in shops here. Google it yourself, and don't buy it.) I'm eating more (locally-grown) fruit, now I'm eating no chocolate,



though I can't pretend that an apple really gives me the sugar surge I was used to; I've stopped spiking on glycerine rushes through the day. I've realised how many ways you can eat fasule beans, and I've learned to make houmous (yes, there are tinned chickpeas available in most of the large supermarkets, and tahini in Albi - mysteriously stocked next to the jams and honeys). Although the packet of soya chunks I bought is still unopened in the cupboard, I'm cooking more and snacking less. I've lost weight. And fewer cows are farting.

I don't have all the zeal of the convert - when Easter comes I

shall be celebrating with some of my old unhealthy habits, even though I know what it does to me and the balance of the planet - but I've proved something to myself; I always knew it would be better to be a vegan. I now know that it's possible, and it's possible in Kosovo.

*Elizabeth Gowing is a founder of The Ideas Partnership, a Kosovan NGO working on education, environmental and cultural 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 theideaspartnership@gmail.com*

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Medium

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Hard

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