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Europe and the Western Balkans: The Day After Kosovo's Independence[1]

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Europe's Goals on the Onset of Kosovo's Independence

The independence of Kosovo was largely assumed to become the final act of the 15 years long Balkan drama, which started in the early 1990s with the wars among former Yugoslav republican entities, breaking the federation in favor of newly created nation states. The Dayton peace accord of 1995 was the first decisive step to end up interethnic massacre in BiH and impose international protectorate rule in order to make multi-ethnic co-existence in one nation state possible. The Kosovo war of 1998-1999, followed by the UN Resolution No 1244[2] proved the last major military effort to curb aggressive strategic initiative of Milosevic's authoritarian regime throughout the former Yugoslav space. The process of post-conflict settlement in the Western Balkans, which followed under international community supervision, was far from reaching results in excellence. International post-conflict mediation in the region achieved two major results. *First*, the democratic choice of Serb citizens was guaranteed and the decade long dictatorship of Slobodan Milosevic was terminated with the presidential elections, followed by a democratic revolution in Serbia in October 2005. *Second*, international military and political presence in the Western Balkans (in BiH, Kosovo and Macedonia) effectively stopped interethnic armed hostilities and channeled the crises in Southern Serbia (2000-2001), Macedonia (2001) into negotiated agreements, or – at least – into cold peace (Northern Kosovo - 2004). Negotiating the final status of Kosovo between Belgrade and Pristina was *the third* major purpose of the international community, aimed at avoiding abrupt change of borders and emerging of a new nation state – Kosovo - as a primary consequence of war.

Declaring Kosovo independent was contained in time also because the performance of Kosovar Albanian elites and administration did not demonstrate a sufficient level of equipment to deal with the challenges of independent government. 'Standards before status' was the formulae of exercising political pressure upon local politicians to deliver upon democratic institutional build-up before any claims of independence are made legitimate.

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[1] This paper reflects only the personal views of the author.

[2] Resolution 1244 Adopted by the Security Council at its 4011th meeting, on June 10, 1999 is the basic document, regulating so far the status of Kosovo and the international presence there.

From the perspective of today we have to admit that both expectations – of reaching a cooperative level of Serb – Albanian negotiations, and of achieving a sufficient level of institutional performance in Pristina – have been quite illusory. Postponing the Kosovo status decision in the years after 2001 has made it much more difficult to determine this final status today than it would have been in the immediate aftermath of democratic changes both in Belgrade and Pristina.

The resolution of the Kosovo conundrum is responsibility of the entire international community, but the EU is supposed to lead the process. We need to define the **framework of interests** and **the strategy of Europe towards Kosovo** in the Western Balkan context *vis-à-vis* the strategic outlooks of all other major factors and players, present in the region. ***First,*** for Europe Kosovo's independence is the last institutional status prerequisite, framing the map of the Western Balkans on the threshold of EU membership. Of course, Balkan countries have to deliver on a large number of issues of reform in order to cope with the accession criteria. But finalizing the map of the Western Balkans is a *conditio sine qua non* for the accession process to begin. In the 1990s there were two nation states in the present Western Balkan region – Yugoslavia and Albania. Today, we have seven state (or to be state) entities (Slovenia excluded) – Serbia, Croatia, BiH, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and – de facto – Kosovo. It is hardly possible to bring the break-away parts of ex-Yugoslavia together – for any purpose, EU membership included. Yet, it is important to finalize the process of disintegration and fragmentation of communities and nation states in the region - if EU accession has to be made a realistic aim in mid-term future.

Second, the EU needs to enlarge not simply over the geographical territory of continent Europe. In order to make European model sustainable, the constituent parts of the EU must reproduce – in communal and institutional life – the basic values, principles and institutional designs of united Europe. All new members from the Europe's East find it difficult to cope with the agenda of adjustment to EU standards, but for the Western Balkans it is even more difficult to adjust. Inviolability of borders and multiethnic – multicultural composition of the nation states are the twin criteria, which made it possible for Europe to overcome the conflict nationalist legacy of the past. Whatever the conflict legacy of the Western Balkans, the twin criteria have to apply to their accession too. One exception will be made – the exception of Kosovo. And it will be made for a number of valuable reasons:

- Kosovo Albanians have been the only sizable community in ex-Yugoslavia, which did not enjoy its own statehood, did not nave republican status. Two million Albanians in Kosovo were reduced to the status of autonomy within Serbia, while 500 000 Montenegrins, 1.2 million Macedonians and 2 million Slovenes had their national republics and were recognized as 'state creating nations' (*drzavotvorni narod*);
- In 1991 the Badinter Commission of the EU (the EEC then) declared the right of all constituent parts of ex-Yugoslavia to self-determination on the basis of the existing borders among the federal republics. All major national communities of the former federations could claim legitimate independence, but the Albanians. Paradoxically, nations with much closer identity like Serbs and Bosniaks, Montenegrins and Serbs, obtained their right of self-determination. Not the Albanians;
- The regime of Milosevic in Belgrade deprived Kosovo Albanians of their autonomy with changing the constitution of Serbia in 1989 and imposed a repressive rule of the Serb army and special police forces over the province of Kosovo. A decade of systematic and severe violation of human rights of Kosovo Albanians followed. The

conflict reached up to execution of mass scale violence by Serb forces against Albanians, and the 1999 military operation by NATO;

Following the decades – probably centuries - of tense relationships between Belgrade and Kosovo Albanians, and bearing in mind the arguments, enlisted above it would be unrealistic on behalf of Europe to insist upon further inclusion of Kosovo into Serbia.

Third, last but not least, it is an issue of overwhelming importance for the EU to close ex-Yugoslav Balkan disputes with its local partners in balanced and cooperative manner, in pursuit of common interest and consensus. Unlike other important international players in the region, the EU is not interested to impose a selective agenda of regional transformation, producing 'winners' and 'losers' on the ground. The EU is interested in a long term 'win – win' strategy, avoiding any effects of a 'zero sum game'. No option in favor of Kosovo – or any other entity – is acceptable enough, if it involves the defeat of Serbia. The EU does not need defeated nations and causes in its own composition. This is not simply a question of tactics or strategy – this is a question of EU identity. Therefore – the insistent consecutive attempts of EU institutions to bring closer Belgrade and Pristina on the negotiating table, the flexibility in postponing final decisions, the efforts to involve all parties, in and out of the region, into the final decision formulae.

The Framework of Interests in the Balkans

Unfortunately, the EU is quite lonesome in the pursuit of this 'win – win' approach. This is why the assumption of Kosovo's independence recognition as the final act of Western Balkans post-conflict settlement will not prove realistic. We all need to think about the day after Kosovo's independence. The final status decision will create a new strategic situation on the ground – not necessarily supportive to the purpose of fast track integration of the Western Balkans into the European mainstream. To explore the optional frameworks of this new strategic situation, we need to define the strategic agenda of the other major factors, operating on the ground.

Serbia

It would be much easier for Belgrade to cope with – if not fully recognize – the independence of Kosovo, if it was put on the table in 2001-2003 as a prerequisite for democratic legitimization of post-Milosevic Serbia. In that period of time Serb democrats and reformist politicians could not be kept responsible for the loss of Kosovo by the public opinion in a country, where the painful memories of authoritarian oppression and national defeat were fresh. The question asked at that time was 'Who lost Kosovo', and the only possible answer was 'Milosevic did'. Today the question rather is 'Can we save Kosovo for Serbia', and the answer – paradoxically enough – seems to become in a way positive every single day.

If Kosovo should be recognized independent – any kind of independence, 'conditional', or 'supervised', the recognition must be made by present day democratic elites of Serbia. 'Kostunica and Tadic' is the answer of the question 'who lost Kosovo' today. In 2001 the defeat over Kosovo might be interpreted as a painful punishment for authoritarian illegitimacy of the Milosevic regime. The loss of Kosovo today – in any pattern of independence imposed on Serbia – will be interpreted as manifest impotence of democratic elites to govern the

country. It will be a manifestation of violating sovereignty and territorial integrity of a democratic country – not of an authoritarian regime with a mass scale oppression record.[3]

Serbia is a country, defeated in a series of wars in the 1990s, with borders, disputed by diverse ex-Yugoslav communities. The effects of what is called 'post-modern tribalism'[4] press Serb authorities to the wall, but the territorial challenges today emerge from within genuine Serb borders. Claims for autonomy or 'independence' are voiced more and more loudly, coming from the Muslim communities of Sandzak, from Vojvodina, where large Hungarian minority lives after WWI[5], from Southern Serbia, named 'Eastern Kosovo' by local Albanians. The independence of Kosovo as part of Serb territory might create a powerful precedent to support internal spill-over of separatism within Serbia – this is the fear of power holders in Belgrade.

In 1999 Russia failed to support Serbia against the NATO invasion. Moscow failed even to get a legitimate representation in KFOR in order to protect Serb minority of Kosovo, subjected to violent repression by revengeful Albanians, and Serb cultural assets, destroyed by angry crowds of Albanians. It is doubtful how much effort would Russia invest in support of the Serb cause in Kosovo today beyond the propaganda efforts and UN Security Council veto threats. Yet Russia is much more powerful and influential today than it was in 1999 and Moscow has its own realistic agenda of extending its influence on the Balkans. This includes exploiting the European and Western rifts over managing the Western Balkans situation. In Belgrade, there is a clear understanding of Moscow instrumental use of Kosovo and of Serb interest in favor of Russia's policy agenda, yet the Serbs do not have too many choices in picking up allies for their Kosovo stand. Russia seems to be the only major power, voicing support for the Serb cause, even if this support might prove again only vocal.

Serb leaders have not been offered an attractive deal in exchange to their potential flexibility on the Kosovo independence issue. A humiliating proposal from Brussels to lift visa restrictions for Serbia in exchange to giving up 15 per cent of Serb national territory (which is the size of Kosovo) has angered Serb public opinion. Obscure and abstract offers for a 'fast track EU integration for Serbia' were also reflected unfavorably by Belgrade, in particular because there is no official unity for such a proposal in the EU, neither does the EU command an alternative 'fast track' procedure for accession, differing from normal membership negotiations.

Instead of offering undeliverable carrots, the major EU powers could declare a special commitment to guarantee national borders of Serbia against further separatist claims and persuade the US to join such a commitment. Guarantees for territorial integrity of Serbia after Kosovo independence might seem an absurd issue from the perspective of Brussels or

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[3] Losing Kosovo is seen as a political suicide in Serbia, The Serb leadership is toughening its position in the wake of January 2008 presidential elections. Mr. Kostunica claimed that the EU should make a choice between Serbia and Kosovo by saying: "We have come to the point where the EU has to choose whether it wants for its partner a whole, internationally recognized Serbia or wants to create a quasi-state on Serbian territory" cited by Reuters on January 3, 2008.

[4] 'Postmodern tribalism' – communal fragmentation on ethnic, regional or clan based identity with rising claims for national status recognition of smaller and smaller entities, caused by the crisis of the nation state in the post-communist and the Third world.

[5] Hungarian minority nominated a Hungarian candidate – Mr. Istvan Pastor - for President of Serbia for the first time in January 2008, which is considered by observers in Belgrade as a 'census of Hungarian support' in Vojvodina.

Washington, but they are – even psychologically – vital for the Serb government and Serb society, watching their country falling apart for almost two decades after 1990.

There is a dangerous assumption both in EU capitals and in Washington that Serb radicalism on the Kosovo independence issue is largely a show up for the public, because Belgrade has no option, but to comply with the facts on the ground.[6] This assumption fails to comprehend one basic change in the international – and the Balkan - strategic situation. The new might of Russia, however shaky and oil price-based it may seem, creates – in combination with several other international factors – a real political and economic alternative to the European integration process. We don't need to be suspicious of the pro-European stand points of Boris Tadic or other democratic leaders in Belgrade. Yet if non-democratic radical nationalists come to power after the next elections, they will have a reference group of allied 'sovereign democracies' in Moscow, Minsk, Baku and Yerevan, Astana and Tashkent. That kind of authoritarian alternative might not be tempting for liberal elites, but could work for nationalist leaders and populists, appealing to coerced national dignity of their grass-roots supporters.[7]

The EU of course is not obliged to make special concessions to Serbia in the context of the Kosovo independence. However, a fair deal is needed with the democratic reformist elites in Belgrade in order to keep Serbia firmly on the European track.

The unilateral declaration of independence, issued by Pristina and supported by the US and the EU will push Belgrade to take advantage of its chances, which could not be voiced or recognized at the negotiating table. The first step in reciprocation to declared independence will be the declaration of Kosovo Serbs that they remain part of Serbia, together with their territories, left within the dominant Albanian majority in the ex-Serbian province. North Mitrovica and the adjacent 'northern triangle' will be the leading community within the 120-150 000 Serbs left in Kosovo to raise and defend its belonging to Serbia. It will be much more challenging and complicating for the post-independence situation, if several other Serb enclaves follow Mitrovica and declare the territory under their control 'inseparable part of Serbia'. The enclaves of Caglavica – Gracanica and Obilic – Kosovo polje are situated deep in the central part of Kosovo and they still have a population of approximately 30 000 Serbs, surrounded completely by Albanian communities. The failure of the international community to adopt the *Ahtisaari plan*[8] for Kosovo, or any other obligatory framework for treating minorities in post-independence Kosovo will open the way to ethnic cleansing campaigns against Serbs and non-Albanians, which could be contained through heavy police and military international (that is EU in practice) presence on the ground.

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[6] An international expert opinion, impatient with the Serb inflexibility, is ready to accept the Radicals on power as an outcome of Serbia's own choice. See a panel discussion by the US Council on Foreign Relations on December 14, 2007. Available at
http://www.cfr.org/publication/15086/independence_for_kosovo.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2F360%2Fserbia
[7] The contracts, signed by Serb President Tadic and PM Kostunica in Moscow in late January, giving up almost the entire Serb energy infrastructure in the hands of 'Gasprom' present a clear example of the scale of Russia's return as strategic factor for Serbia and for the entire region.
[8] Former Finish President Martti Ahtisaari as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented a detailed plan on Kosovo status resolution in March 2007, but was turned down on Serb and Russian objections. The "Ahtisaari Plan" can be found at http://www.unosek.org/unosek/en/statusproposal.html. The plan, among other things would legitimize active EU involvement in Kosovo and Mr. Ahtisaari's proposals were heavily endorsed by the EU.

The protection of splinter Serb enclaves in Kosovo may trigger Belgrade's support, which could amount to partial or even full scale military support in case of serious interethnic clashes. Apart from the effect of further isolation of Belgrade from Europe, Kosovar Serb communities' incompliance with Kosovo status of independence will generate systemic instability and civil unrest threats on the territory of the new state. Another major effect of de-facto partitioning Kosovo will emerge as reflexive claims on behalf of Pristina officials, or Albanian leaders region-wide for re-assessing Kosovo borders *vis-à-vis* compact Albanian population in Southern Serbia (Presevo valley), in the northwest of Macedonia, etc. That could become an immediate spill over effect of Kosovo's independence over those parts of the Balkans, inhabited by Albanian communities.

The multiple effects of Kosovo independence over Serbia and its international standing should also be considered from the perspective of the future geopolitical status of the Balkans within Europe. There is a firm commitment of the EU - as it was already mentioned above – to integrate fully on membership basis all Balkan countries after a transitional process of stabilization and post-conflict development. If Kosovo independence leads to a process of internal political de-stabilization of Serbia, to domination of non-democratic political formations in Belgrade, or to self-alienation of Serbia from the process of integration into the European mainstream, the strategic picture of the Balkan region may change for the observable future. An offended neutral Serbia could become the staging area for an expanding Russian influence and for splitting the Balkans into 'zones of influence' between Europe and Russia, or Russia and the West in general. This will be a repetition of the darkest pages in Balkan history from the 19th and 20th century on.

Independent Kosovo and the Albanian communities of the Balkan Region

It is difficult to plan and assess the performance of Albanian communities in time for a number of interdependent reasons. Albanians are the youngest nation on the Balkans in terms of its political awakening and nation building[9]. Divided into two big tribal groups – or entities – '*Tosks*' and '*Gegs*', belonging to majority Muslim confession with sizable Orthodox and catholic Christian minorities – yet quite indifferent to religion outside family and tradition, Albanians live in the age of traditional society with strong clan – family structures and weak bonding at modern national – institutional level. Albanian communities are decentralized, clan based and divided in terms of identity by the south-north axis (*Tosks* – *Gegs* tribal division). The ghost of 'Greater Albania', haunting the Balkan political astrology is a real factor of consideration only in terms of Albanian impressive demographic dynamics. Politically – as well as in terms of elites' awareness – territorial unification of all Albanians is not a realistic expectation for the observable future.

Albania proper – is a natural defender and supporter of Kosovo independence, after decades of Serb occupation and control. Dominated by traditional historicist mentality like all other Balkan nations, Albanians could bring to the debate as many arguments for Kosovo, being

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[9] We're always on a slippery ground in assessing 'old' and 'young' nations on the Balkans. Calling Albanians 'young' may raise objections that as an ethnic group they inhabit Balkan lands earliest than all other nations of today – even the Greeks. There are, beyond doubt, attempts of nation building on the Balkans, which are 'younger' than the Albanian efforts to national consolidation – Macedonians and Muslim Bosniaks are examples to the case. Yet in the classical nation-state development in the Balkans, Albanians develop a movement of national emancipation latest, and the level of their national integrity – even if quite hot – is still loose and largely pre-modern.

'the cradle' of their national identity, as the Serbs. Yet we can hardly expect Albania proper to intervene in a significant manner in the processes, following Kosovo's independence for the following reasons. *First*, Albania is a small and weak nation state, still dominated by the consequences of decades-long self-isolation under Stalinist rule. The country has very limited institutional, economic and military potential to participate actively in an international process, even if related to regional issues. *Second,* Albania is split into South and North between both major ethno-tribal groups – *Tosks* and *Gegs* – and the political divisions in the country follow exactly this split. The South belongs to the Socialist Party, and the North – to the Democratic Party. There is an established balance between North and South, between *Gegs* and *Tosks*. If we presume any opportunity of merging Albania with Kosovo into a 'Greater Albania' project, the first problem the new state is going to face is the hegemony of *Gegs vis-à-vis Tosks* reduction to the status of minority. *Third,* having spent communist rule epoch into liberal ex-Yugoslavia (even if deprived of republican status) compared to Stalinist 'stone-age' regime of Enver Hoxha, Kosovar Albanians claim priority in terms of culture, civilization, international experience and affluence in relationship to their southern brothers. They also boast with their contribution to the Albanian renaissance process of 19th and 20th centuries, superior to that of the South. There are hardly chances of bridging the fault lines, enlisted above into a full scale 'Greater Albania' unification process in observable future. We may have two or more Albanian state entities or communities included into other nation states, and the relationships among them will remain at the level of friendly principalities within a largely pre-modern, clan based political environment.

Independent Kosovo – is more likely to claim 'Greatness' rather than a hypothetic united Albania. 'Greater Kosovo' is a realistic project within the context, which will follow the independence status. *First,* the self-perception of Kosovar Albanian elites – old and new – is the one of leading Albanian communities' liberation from alien rule and domination. The communal and political development of Albanians in Macedonia, in Montenegro, in Serbia proper is very much influenced by the development of Kosovar Albanian community itself. In the 1970s and the 80s Pristina has been the culture center for all Albanians of ex-Yugoslavia, in particular provided the miserable status to which Albania proper was reduced to. The Albanian national elite of Kosovo – both within the Communist Union (headed by Mahmut Bakali), and opposing it (the group around Ibrahim Rugova) – has lead the process of rising and emancipating Albanian national self-awareness on modern basis. The University of Pristina, the Kosovar TV in Pristina, the writers' union and all other institutions of education and culture have produced the intellectual program of present day's Albanian national renaissance.

Second, Kosovo is the largest entity of Albanian Gegs. In Albania proper *Tosks* are the more privileged, historically injecting modernizing ideas in the country, which gave birth to the elite in independent Albania after 1912. This is another major reason of Kosovar Albanian influence among Albanians in Macedonia – 95 per cent of them are *Gegs* too, in Montenegro and in Southern Serbia. Immediately after the end of the Kosovo war in 1999 the KLA leadership embarked on an ambitious program of heading irredentist all-Albanian movement of 'Greater Kosovo'. 'Liberation armies' of Albanians emerged overnight in Southern Serbia and Macedonia, causing major crises, even endangering the fragile Macedonian republic with full scale collapse. Kosovar Albanian elite also influences – even if milder – the communal developments in Sandzak, where majority Muslims are considered to be ex-Albanians, allegedly converted before centuries into Slavs.

Third, the likelihood of *de facto* split of Kosovo after the independence by remaining Serbs raises sharply the risks of an Albanian - irredentist spill over campaign into the neighboring Albanian-populated regions. There is an assumption of Western governments that Kosovo Albanian leaders could be persuaded to publicly give up further irredentist ambitions after the independence of Kosovo is pronounced. Such an assumption is shaky – it rests on a *parole d'honeur* with no binding power for the local bosses, even if they operate efficient control over their country – which is not and will not be the case in clan-divided Kosovo. Apart from that – a split of Kosovo between Albanians and Serbs will make claims to further 'liberation' of Albanians if not legitimate, at least hard to resist.

Albanian communities throughout the Western Balkans – are concentrated mostly in Southern Serbia, in Macedonia and Montenegro. The Albanians of Southern Serbia are in a way 'the lightest fraction' of the entire Albanian communal cocktail out of Kosovo. They are the primary suspect of a direct spill-over attempt, emerging from the independence of Pristina. They inhabit the Presevo valley, considered to be part of what Albanians call 'larger Kosovo'. But even if we go beyond definitions and considerations, three factors are important to mention. First, Albanian communities of Presevo valley have lived historically closest to the Albanians of Kosovo and would be very much tempted to leave the hostile environment of post-Kosovo Serbia in favor of re-joining their brothers on the other side of the border. Second, Presevo valley has very often been considered – even if informally – by the Albanians as the possible swap region in exchange for the Northern triangle in case of splitting Kosovo. Third, Presevo valley lies on the strategic corridor between Belgrade and Athens, which holds the keys to control the southern part of the Balkans – therefore it represents a significant asset for an independent Kosovo, locked within the territories of Serbia and Macedonia.

Albanians of Macedonia are the largest community outside Kosovo and Albania proper, counting at about 600 - 800 000 people. After 1999 they have participated in several armed attempts to improve their communal status in the common state with 1.2 million Slav Macedonians. They are sponsored – organizationally and logistically - from Kosovo soil. The major rebellion of Albanians in Macedonia in 2001 has led to an upgrade of Macedonian Constitution and to the adoption of a bi-lateral agreement (*Ohrid Agreement*), providing special status of privilege to the Albanian community. According to this *Agreement* Albanians – the second largest community – have to be represented in the majority of every important institutional decision ('Badinter majority') within a system of large decentralization of power in favor of local decision making. This attempt at *consociational* - or *consensual democracy* provides vast spaces for self government to Albanians in Macedonia plus large shares of power at national level, aimed at resisting their appetites for separatism. So far the system works, supported also by the motivation of the Albanian community to take advantage of Slav Macedonian demographic crisis and extend its presence and control over additional territories of the Republic of Macedonia. It remains to be seen whether this double temptation – of institutional power and demographic expansion – will keep Macedonian Albanian elites out of separatist – irredentist projects in the mid-term future.

Albanians in Montenegro are relatively small number - about 5 per cent - and have so far negotiated their status within the tiny republic. They could hardly represent a significant crisis or spill over potential, except in one case – crisis in the region of Sandzak, shared between Serbia and Montenegro. With its more than 220,000 Muslims, representing about 55 per cent of the population, Sandzak is a potential crisis zone if territorial integrity and stability of Serbia after Kosovo independence are not strengthened and guaranteed.

The independence of Kosovo will not substantively alter the dynamics of Albanian national question on the Balkans. The temptations to emancipate different Albanian communities from state systems, dominated by other ethnicities and nations might even be strengthened, following Kosovo success. Applying European model of cross-national multicultural living will not necessarily provide institutional framework of Albanian national renaissance in the short or mid-term, because nationalism and multiculturalism represent two very different from each other pictures of the world. When we assess the clan-based, tribal infrastructure of Albanian national life, we also need to assess its implications over the economic, social and political infrastructure of Kosovo and the entire region of the Western Balkans.

With its 11 000 sq. km of territory and more than 2 million of population, Kosovo represents a significant social, economic and law and order problem for the Balkan region in the observable future. Kosovo may get independence, but it will be much more difficult to get decent economic development chances. Apart from latest improvement of investment interest and the traditional support by the international Albanian diaspora, Kosovo economy is based almost entirely on cash-flows, providing services and goods for UNMIK and KFOR and on deeply rooted and clan based illegal trafficking networks, extending well beyond the borders of this relatively small territory. Albanian mafia networks control a lion share of drugs, weapons and white slaves traffic in the southern Balkan region, and their activities reach well beyond the Balkans, extending to Europe and the US. One major common concern of the Balkan countries, resisting their approval of Kosovo's independence is the suspicion that large parts of Kosovo political and business elites occupy key positions in those illegal networks and criminal traffic. The relationships between KLA, its leaders and its present day political representation with organized criminal networks of the region are sort of "a public secret" for the expert community and the international institutions.

The independence of Kosovo – within the preserved organized crime context – will only add to the institutional insecurity and instability of the Southern Balkan region. If we have a sovereign country, with a government heavily dominated by criminal structures and interest, we run the risk to live in an environment, where every major smuggler or mafia dealer could hold a diplomatic passport. What is even more important – we have to outline this security challenge, provided that all governments of the region are pretty well infiltrated by illegitimate economic interests and influenced by grey and black economy dictate. Outlining the Kosovo case in this context is a real red light that has to be taken into consideration before it is too late. The independence of Kosovo should not only be 'conditional' and 'supervised', it should be very directly observed, monitored and assessed, corrective changes should be previewed in the status of the province and enforced for at least a decade to come.

The explicit relationship between large parts of Kosovo elites and the organized crime is also reflected in the growing pressure between the institutions and the citizens of the province. We are far from the enthusiastic honeymoon of freedom in 1999-2000. We are also quite far away from the full-fledged democratic process of the first years of practically independent national life, when vast majorities of 80-90 per cent of Kosovars have voted and have expected independence and improvement of their lives. Independence is still expected, but less that 45 per cent have shown up at the ballot box in November. The 'Us' and 'Them' feeling of disappointment and frustration is overwhelming vast portions of the middle class, and in particular – the younger generations of Kosovo. The inability of the power holders to deliver is painfully assessed together with their growing illegitimate personal fortunes. Their activities are judged largely as systematic efforts to fill their own pockets, irrespectively of

public interest. The independence claim, the expectation of full independence is what deters this public frustration, prevents it from open show up. Once independence is a fact of life, no more restrictions will contain public disappointment. That is another element of potential destabilization, which might be expected after the independence recognition process is over.

The Neighbors in the Balkan Region

There is a common skepticism, reigning on the Balkans towards an independent Kosovo. Of course, some countries (Greece, Romania) are more skeptical than others (Bulgaria, Croatia), the dynamics of Kosovo issue has also changed viewpoints in vulnerable neighbors like Macedonia. Skopje has been much more hesitant to accept an independent Kosovo in 1999-2002 than today, when Macedonian politicians support and even welcome finalizing Kosovo issue. The only threat, they perceive as real for Macedonia is independence, followed by split of Kosovo – which will open 'Pandora's box' of territorial change in the region. Skepticism about Kosovo's independence among neighbors has its psychological as well as strategic backgrounds. The emerging of a new nation is a serious change of the *status quo* in the region. Balkan people do not like changes, in particular radical ones – they usually suffer as a consequence of them. There's an uneven dynamics of national development within the Balkan region. Albanian nationalism – a rising political force, aimed at its zenith – is considered a danger not only by Serbs, directly affected by Kosovo separation, but also by most other Balkan nations, which have passed the climax of nationalist enthusiasm and have paid bitter price for the most of its peaks – Bulgaria in 1913 and 1919, Greece in 1923, Serbia in 1991-1999 until present. The raising of Albanian national question is bitterly affecting the neighbors that have benefited historically from Albanian national immaturity and have gained territories, inhabited by Albanian communities. But even those Balkan countries, which have never had control on disputed territories inhabited by Albanians, face their dynamic demographic expansion, which constitutes them as the youngest nation of the region, with birth rates sharply contrasting to the population decline of most other communities.

The ethno-political challenge of Albanian demographic expansion is particularly painful, provided firm Albanian unwillingness to share territories and communal spaces with other ethnicities. Albanians have an efficient system of non-violent cleansing of other ethnic groups from a conquered habitat, which combines economic stimuli with informal pressure. If non-violent instruments do not work sufficiently well, violence is also used – as in the case of Kosovo minorities after 1999. Majority of Albanians do not live in the age of multiculturalism and postmodern liberalism – they rather inhabit the harsh world of tribal identity and cohesion, alien and opposing to the other tribes around. The mentality of Albanian tribal unity, materialized in their demographic and territorial expansion, creates the image of an 'Albanian wall stepping against you', as a local Slav Macedonian told me in Tetovo in 2001.[10]

In strategic terms, the rise of Albanian nationalism – a landmark of which is the independence of Kosovo – causes anxiety among Albanian neighbors in several dimensions. ***The first*** of them is the expected direct spill over effect on the immediate neighbors. If a country like Macedonia is de-stabilized, consequences might affect the entire region – re-opening the historical 'Macedonian question' is against the interests of all former contenders Greece,

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[10] Demographic data indicates that the share of Albanians in Macedonia has risen from 12% in 1957 to 25,17% in 2002, with the birthrate of Albanians 29,5 per million and that of Slav Macedonians at 17,4 per million. See Natasha Gaber and Aneta Joveska "Macedonian census results – controversy or reality?", in South-East Europe Review 1/2004.

Bulgaria and Serbia (even if Milosevic tried to gain unilateral benefits from de-stabilizing Skopje in 1999). Destabilization of Southern Serbia, Montenegro or any other locality, inhabited by Albanians will also plunge the entire region into economic stagnation, major foreign interests' infiltration and interethnic crises. *Second*, independent Kosovo may cause a 'domino effect' of indirect spill-over crises. **Romania** is anxious to permit a precedent of territorial emancipation of an ethnic minority as Kosovar Albanians, provided the potential rise of claims of the large Hungarian community (about 1,5 million) of Transylvania. Serbs also fear induced Hungarian unrest in Vojvodina. **Greeks** are not happy of any minority issues, raised on their soil, while many *Bulgarians* relate predominantly Muslim Albanian claims for communal emancipation with potential problems that their country might have one day with its numerous Muslim – predominantly Turkish minority.

Third, demographic expansion and tribal cohesion represent a real challenge to Albanian neighbors, when combined with hectic institutional environment and mass scale criminal networking as the major source of making community's living. No one expects very high standards of law and order and anti-corruption measures on the Balkans, yet both vices of crime and corruption represent the key obstacles to development and efficient integration into the EU mainstream. The perspective of having a national administration (in Kosovo), directly springing out of the criminal networks and the KLA past does not inject optimism in any Balkan capital city, where the authorities have enough of crime and corruption on their plate, in order to accept additional portions of criminal immunity in the region.

Fourth and last, but not least, independent Kosovo changes the geopolitical balances of the Balkan region. Some local players may view that more as an opportunity, rather than a danger, others consider it completely unacceptable. *Serbia* and *Greece* represent the status quo powers of the region. They have been the favorite partners of victorious Great Powers of 1913, 1919 and 1945. The territorial and political axis Belgrade – Athens has been the backbone of the Balkan strategic balance for the most of the 20th century. This axis marginalized former imperial power – post-Ottoman Turkey in Balkan affairs and reduced twice defeated Bulgaria to a provincial status – in particular when assisted by Soviet occupation of Bulgaria for half a century. The end of the Cold War and the suicidal strategy of Milosevic Serbia to reshape ex-Yugoslavia in its own favor have shaken the Serb – Greek axis, but did not jeopardize it. The initial frustration – in particular of Athens – with the emergence of an independent Republic of Macedonia was compensated with intense partnership to impose control over the institutions and the economy of the young country. The Serb dominated elite of Macedonia provided best possible preconditions for Greek economic expansion and practical control over the economy of the small republic, which has chosen a name, completely unacceptable by historically sensitive Greeks. There are curious assumptions that when faced with the end of his control over Skopje in 1999, Milosevic delivered significant parts of his security networks in Skopje to Athens – to be operated in common interest.

An independent Kosovo – together with Albanian dominated Southern Serbia – additionally hinders strategic cooperation between Athens and Belgrade, impeding territorial, institutional and economic infrastructure of Serb – Greek hegemony. Impeding the dominant North – South dimension of Balkan strategic balance, designed in Versailles of 1919, Kosovo, together with other Albanian communities, with Bosnia – emancipated from Serb control, provide strategic energy to reconfigure regional balances in an alternative East – West axis, supportive – among other geopolitical effects – to the ambitions of Turkey to play an expanding role in the Balkan region. Viewed as a major symbol of that reconfiguration,

independent Kosovo gets the support of BiH, Croatia and all other regional factors, willing to see Serb influence over ex-Yugoslavia reduced without feeling endangered by a hypothetic Turkish – Muslim domination over the Balkan region.

Bulgaria plays an interesting role in this context, because of the internal controversy of its national interest, reflected in the nature of its foreign policy. Breaking the Serb – Greek axis liberates Sofia from its provincial status, inherited from Versailles and provides Bulgaria with new opportunities to extend its regional role. Yet in a longer run, Bulgaria finds Greece and Serbia as natural allies against Turkish – Muslim expansion in the Balkan region. Bulgaria has suffered – together with all Balkan nations – half a millennium of Ottoman domination, broken only in 1878 with decisive Russian assistance. Bulgaria is the only Balkan country with relatively large Turkish and other Muslim minorities, expanding their role in country's public life in the last 20 years. Strategic orientations of Bulgaria have always been controversial, split between nationalist–conservative, pro-Slavic and pro-Russian orientations, and pro-Western, liberal and cosmopolitan attitudes and policies. Present day Socialist (that is ex-communist) Party is the heir of pro-Russian policy attitudes, which socialists of today claim to combine effectively with the dominant pro-European – pro-Atlantic dimension of their foreign policy. In the Kosovo independence context, pro-Russian means also supportive to Serb – Greek considerations and arguments, softened by the imperative to serve a good job as a young member of European socialist community, and – therefore – cautiously support independence of Kosovo as a common European decision. That is, in effect, the position of present day Bulgarian government, dominated by the Socialist Party.

The liberal and center-right parties of Bulgaria are more explicit and firm supporters of Kosovo's independence, based on the assumption of accepting the new regional status quo as favorable for the country. The then-prime minister of the UDF party Ivan Kostov developed a policy of special support and assistance for Kosovo after 1999 as to a special partner in the region. This kind of policy is understandable also from a historical point of view – from all Balkan nations Bulgarians have always maintained the best relationships with Albanians from all parts of the region. Bulgarian modern development after the country's emancipation from the Ottomans has been considered a model for the Albanian national renaissance, which started later on.

Turkey is the regional power, symptomatically missing from the public debate on Kosovo final status. Ankara unconditionally supports the independence for Pristina, yet it demonstrates almost no public activity on the issue. There are three basic reasons for that. *First,* Turkey is the heir of the Ottoman Empire – a historical entity, still producing polar views and assessments throughout the Balkan region. *Second,* non-interventionism in the domain of the former empire and outside of the borders of Turkey is recommended by Kemalism – the official doctrine of the Turkish state. This recommendation has become quite blurred with the time, in particular after 1980 and until present, when the growing economic and political might of Turkey has generated active strategies of expanding Turkish influence and Turkish interest. *Third,* Turkey has no incentive to intervene in Kosovo status issue, provided that the dominant international position for independence of the province does fully express Turkish national interest on that topic. Independent Kosovo will be another close partner and ally of Turkey in the Balkan region.

There is one interesting element in the Turkish position on Kosovo: neither Ankara, nor any other party in the international process has ever made a relationship between Kosovo

independence and the Turkish Kurdish question. Does Turkey fear such an analogy? We have to ask, probably…

Summarizing the regional Balkan attitudes towards an independent Kosovo, we have to admit prevailing skepticism towards the act of recognition and the changes in regional situation, which will follow. With all the complexity of interests, which supports that skepticism, it is obvious that the key to improving regional attitudes towards the independence is in the hands of Kosovar Albanians and their leaders. A positive evolution in institution building, in law and order and reduction of organized crime in Pristina will prove sufficient to gain the support of majority opinion in the region. A failure to deliver upon those priorities will put Kosovo into a ghetto of suspicion and hostility, which will prove disastrous for the country, fully dependent upon regional cooperation for its survival and economic development.

The US and the Independence of Kosovo

Unlike the other two major international players – the EU and Russia, the US has limited and selective strategic agenda in the Balkan region. The end of the Cold War has brought changes into the US strategic doctrines, related to the region in two ways. *First*, the demise of the Soviet Union decreased the level of importance of the entire Cold War frontline – the Balkans included - for the global strategy of Washington. American disengagement went as far as the declaration of State Secretary James Baker in the autumn of 1990 in Belgrade, concerning the future of Yugoslav federation – 'We've got no dog buried here…' Yet, American indifference to the ex-Yugoslav crisis did not last for too long. The Bosnian slaughters and Europe's helplessness to properly intervene brought US troops on the Balkans for now more than a decade. Having sponsored the Dayton agreement of 1995, the Clinton administration went further in its massive efforts to fix the Balkan crisis with the war on Kosovo of 1999. The motivation of the US-led international coalition was both pragmatic and value based – the Milosevic regime was an arrogant negation of all basic principles of the democratic West, and of Europe in particular.

If Democrats could get a third consecutive mandate in November 2000, Kosovo independence would have been a closed deal – probably no later than 2002-2003. The Republican administration of George W. Bush has been hesitant from the very beginning to put the Balkans among its priorities. After September 11 and Afghanistan and Iraq that followed, the major question, related to the Balkan crisis was how to get faster out of there.

We can often hear American statements about the need to fully integrate the Balkans into Europe, yet the strategic importance of the region for the US is not related to European affairs.   After 1989 – at the *second* place, the Balkans constitute for Washington a strategic periphery of the Middle East. The support for Muslim communities in Bosnia and Kosovo, the infrastructure assistance for developing Corridor No 8 – as the East – West axis of Balkan transport and communication[11], initiatives like SECI,   the SEEBRIG and Defense Ministerial

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[11] Corridor No 8 is one of the Pan-European transport and communication corridors. There is also a US-backed project to supplement the corridor with a oil-pipeline – AMBO - transiting oil from East to West from the port of Burgas to the Albanian cost and further to Western Europe.

military cooperation initiatives from the mid-90s,[12] the NATO accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the establishing of military bases and facilities in Kosovo ('Bondsteel' after1999 - the backbone of KFOR) and in Bulgaria and Romania in 2006 – all those are consecutive steps in transforming the Balkan region into a bridgehead for the US and NATO operations, aimed at the 'Greater Middle East', the Black Sea – Caspian dimension included. The Balkan military infrastructure has to play a complementary role to the Turkish contribution in the Atlantic Alliance, and a compensatory role for the growing uncertainty in Turkish military partnership with the US (the Iraq case as an example).

With completing the political and military build-up on the Balkans for the purposes of US strategic communications to the East, Washington is more hesitant to spend additional money and commit military efforts for additional operations on the Balkans. Yes, the US would like to see the Balkans as an integral part of the EU, as an affluent and peaceful region of Europe. Let Europe pay for that. The final act of fixing the Balkan region from the perspective of American selective strategy is finalizing the status of Kosovo. Washington is insistent on that – for a number of reasons. *First*, this is the final act of more than a decade long US commitment (which has started in Bosnia in 1994). *Second*, it is a kind of foreign policy success – not a big one, but a success – in the particular background of Iraq, Iran and all other troubles, framing the end of G. W. Bush's Presidency. *Third*, postponing further the independence claim of Kosovo Albanians may lead to rebellion and regressive destabilization of the region, precluding further US engagement and spending. *Last,* but not least, doing this favor to Kosovars strengthens American positions of not simply respected, but adored ally and patron for all Albanians on the Balkans. This is a valuable asset for Washington in a region of controversial attitudes towards America among all other major nations and ethnic communities.

Fixing the independence of Kosovo – today or tomorrow – may cause, and will cause further problems and complications for the Western Balkans. It could destabilize neighbors, it could bring nationalist Radicals to power in Belgrade, or it may open space for further Russian strategic penetration into the region. To the extent, to which those problems do not touch upon the list of limited US priorities on the Balkans – they will have to be dealt with from Brussels. Yet… we're on the Balkans. It is difficult to tell where problems of democracy, development and stability start, and where issues of military security and reliable security partnership end. This is why, transatlantic partnership between Brussels and Washington on the Balkans will have to continue – whatever the changing balance of responsibilities and expenses for the both shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

Kosovo's Independence and the Return of Russia on the Scene

Moscow felt humiliated in 1999 when the neighbors of Serbia in the NATO coalition did not allow Russian troops to fly in Kosovo. Russia's purpose was to get control over the northern part of the occupied province, inhabited mostly by Serbs, together with the major Western powers, serving sectors of Kosovo territory. Among all other practical motivations, the

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[12] SECI - Southeast European Co-operative Initiative - was lunched as an idea of the US administration in May 1995. It focused on an array of cooperation issues among the participation SEE states, but now is focused on regional cooperation in combating organized crime (www.secicenter.org). SEEBRIG – South East Europe Brigade – is a multinational peacekeeping force consisting of contingents from the Balkan countries. It was envisaged as a mechanism for defense military cooperation on the onset of the Balkan wars of the 1990s. It's political dimension is the South-East Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) Process.

Russian policies towards Kosovo status today are aimed at getting also a symbolic reprisal for the failure of Moscow to serve its 'Great Power duty' and interest back in 1999.

There are several consecutive levels of interpretation to understand Russia's strategy towards Kosovo independence. *First*, Russia is a rising power, aiming at an impressive return on the world stage as a 'Great Power' after a decade of humiliating impotence (as perceived by Moscow itself). To regain strategic initiative in Asia against powerful China or resurgent Islamic South is hard, close to impossible within the present day resource framework of Russia.[13] A space of strategic expansion of Russia is open only westwards – into the eastern soft periphery of Europe, where mostly post-communist countries – new members of NATO and the EU – still battle with the instability of their transition to market democracies. The strategy of energy flows monopolization, pursued by Russia towards Europe – in particular former Eastern Europe – is the first step to regaining strategic control over this territory, dominated by small and fragile countries, with corrupt political elites and vulnerable institutional systems. Moscow is quite intensely testing its new chances throughout the region, especially provided the ill-coordinated, awkward and clumsy policies of united Europe towards Russia, and the American obsession with the so called 'war on terror'. The Balkans has a special place within Russia's strategic return to the East of Europe.

Russia has a special role in the traditional strategic balance of the Balkan region. In the 19th century the Russian empire served as patron of the Slav Balkan nations and Greece, dominated by the Ottomans, and sponsored – with its political and military might – their emancipation from Ottoman rule. This policy was part of the 'Third Rome's' dominant strategy to conquer the Bosporus Straits and restore the imperial realm of Byzantine under the scepter of the Russian tsar. Anytime the division line between Christian Slavs and Muslims (supported by Turkish – Ottoman in retrospective - might) on the Balkans deepens, the protective role of Russia reanimates itself as a powerful psychological and political reaction among Serbs, Bulgarians, Montenegrins. That is the *second* level of understanding present Russia's role in Kosovo final status debate. Both leaders and ordinary citizens of Serbia understand the instrumental role that Kosovo plays in Russia's power-play in the region – yet they have no other support and protection from the outer world to defend their cause in Kosovo and readily accept the help, coming from Moscow. Europe – and the West - offer scarce compensations to Belgrade to accept the loss of Kosovo. The future of affluent, integrated living of all Western Balkans into the EU was deemed only the quite a longer run. Moscow offers help immediately in defending an old – and usual - division line: the frontier between Slav Orthodox identity and the Muslim threat. This border cuts through Kosovo and was defended by Serb heroes since 1389, the battle of Kosovo polje.

This context is important to understand the role of the Balkans in Russia's strategy of 'Great Power' return in the east of Europe. Strategic control – as Europe understands it - requires stability, integration, pursuit for homogeneity of values, of institutions, of communal self-awareness. This is what the EU works for and pays for in the Western Balkans, trying to adapt the local nations into the standards of the European mainstream. Kosovo independence is an end of a conflict, which prevents this integration process from taking place in observable future. That was the same motivation of Europe in trying to sort out the conflict in Macedonia

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[13] In properly assessing both its relative weakness *vis-à-vis* the powerful rise of China and the pressing treat of Chinese economic, demographic and – potentially – political penetration of scarcely populated Siberia, Moscow went forward with an intense program of partnership with Beijing, the defense cooperation (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) included. To what extent such an approach of Russia will slow down or waive the pressing Chinese challenge is to be observed within the next 1-2 decades.

of 2001, in sponsoring post-conflict development of BiH, etc. Russia of today represents the opposite strategic interest to Europe. To regain strategic initiative, to expand, to conquer, you need to divide, to contradict, to split, to initiate or support disunity and conflict – this is how you penetrate an 'alien territory'. Russia does that systematically in Ukraine, in Moldova, in the South Caucasus in maintaining strategic influence over the post-Soviet space. It's harder to do that in Central Europe, where memories of Soviet domination are painfully alive. It is also difficult to promote such a strategy even on the Balkans in an environment of peace and successful development. Once the division line between Islam and Orthodoxy reappears, once Slavs have to face 'Turks'[14] on the front line, Russian strategic sponsorship and control is welcome again.

In practical terms, at a ***third level***, Kosovo status plays an important role as a precedent for Russia's strategic return. Paradoxically enough, Kosovo is supporting Russian interest both if it becomes independent, and if the final status is postponed (as claimed by Russian officials in public). An independent Kosovo will open the space to support Serbs in their claims for the northern triangle and the other Serb populated enclaves of Kosovo. It will provide the background for a deepening spill-over crisis – if Kosovo Albanians follow on the *de facto* split of the province with irredentist actions, destabilizing Presevo valley in Serbia, or Sandzak, or Macedonia. Russia also benefits from an indirect spill over effects of Kosovo independence. In legal terms, if Kosovo could become independent against the will of sovereign Serbia, the same status should be granted to the splinter enclaves of post-Soviet Georgia – Abkhazia and South Osetia, to separatist Transdniestria, or even to Crimea in case of Ukrainian departure to the West.

Yet, Russia does not need Kosovo's independence practically executed in order to benefit from the final status issue. Russia benefits from Kosovo as a problem, not as a resolution. Preserving the undecided status quo of Pristina actually extends in time the threat from Moscow that Kosovo may constitute a precedent. Russia does not need independent Abkhazia, or splinter Crimea – Russia needs a low intensity conflict in each of those small spots in order to prevent resolution and reintegration of those disputes into a status quo out of Russian control.

Fourth, but not least, as mentioned in the very beginning, Russian influence, and – if needed – a veto on Kosovo status finalization plays the role of symbolic re-legitimization of Moscow as a 'Great Power' after the failure of 1999. Today Russia has a massive economic presence in Serbia, Montenegro, but also in the energy and tourism sector of EU member Bulgaria. Russia is a veto power on the Kosovo status issue. It would be probably recommendable for Brussels from now on to consult Moscow for the important steps of Europe on the Western Balkans – EU membership, security, interethnic peace? We should remember the official position of Russia of early 2007, when Moscow banned the import of particular commodities from Poland and Bulgaria with an argument, directed towards Brussels: "You should have asked us before granting membership to Bulgaria and Romania…"

Yet the chances and the potential scope of success for the Russian strategy towards Kosovo in the Western Balkan context should not be overestimated. The cordial relations between Moscow and Belgrade are very much dependent on the fact that Serbs and Russians do not

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[14] 'Turks' is not an average ethnicity or national identification in this context – it rather is the general concept of the invader, of the alien threat, of a humiliating power, imposing a barbarian hostile order on the Balkans. Albanians – the Kosovars included – have been part of the 'Ottoman Turks' – being Muslim and performing security executive roles within the Ottoman Empire

know each other well. Serbs have never tasted the nature of Russian imperial rule – thanks to Josip Broz Tito, and Russians have quite bleak idea how tough customers Serbs could be in defending their interest.[15] Russia might be the only 'Great Power' to defend Serbia on Kosovo, but the Serbs know well that in effect Moscow does not have too much to offer.

Identifying the Underlying Causes of Balkan's Maladies

The post-independence environment around Kosovo and throughout the Western Balkans will be dependent, apart from the strategic influences analyzed above, also upon the development of a number of societal and organizational factors, stemming from the socioeconomic and political processes in the region after 1990. **The interethnic wars, the post-conflict development** and the process of **transition from communist rule** have deeply impacted the development of those – mostly – post-Yugoslav societies. In its efforts to design an appropriate strategy of stabilization and accession of the Balkan countries, the EU should consider the importance of several factors, stemming from the societal environment of the region.

A destructive process of **communal fragmentation** and **de-modernization** is the first important factor to be considered by the EU strategy for the region. The EU grants membership status to **modern nations** – that is relatively large, sustainable in terms of economic and institutional behavior identity groups, capable to reproduce a civil environment of relationships between citizens and institutions, dependent on formal rules, and not on blood relationship or kinship. The disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia has shaken the identity, the integrity and the limits of most nations in project, emerging out of the bloody conflicts in the 1990s. Serbia has challenged borders, no guarantees for final territorial status. Macedonia drifts among alternative options of its own statehood, based on mutually exclusive principles – ethnicity, citizenship, unitary, federal or cantonal nature of the state. BiH is an international protectorate of unshared parallel living of Serbs, Bosniaks and melting down through emigration Croats. Albania proper is still in the starting period to compensate for the barbarian isolationism of the late communist regime. Kosovo is aiming at national status with grim chances for economic development and mounting pressures from a growing community of young people with no future on their soon to be independent soil. A number of smaller Albanian communities are anxiously claiming decent status in the neighboring weak states.

Left on its own, this environment could easily produce a second wave of fragmentation, based on what is called a '*postmodern tribalism*' – irresistible temptation for smaller and smaller communities to utilize the crisis of the nation state in favor of their autonomist or separatist

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[15] Belgrade initially rejected the price-offer of Moscow to purchase the largest state owned Serb energy company – NIS. 'Gasprom' tried to get a favorable deal under pressure – in exchange for supporting Serbia on Kosovo. Serbs did not step back. Economy and Privatization Minister Mladjan Dinkic, said in Serb Politika daily that the Russian offer was "humiliating" for Serbia, and criticized the rest of the government for agreeing to consider its terms. *(International Herald Tribune, December 31, 2007, "Serbian government split over Russia's gas offer".)*Yet after neighboring Bulgaria signed with 'Gasprom' the South Stream gas-pipeline project, and on the eve of Serbian presidential elections, President Tadic and PM Kostunica visited Moscow and gave up to Russian pressure, selling NIS to 'Gasprom' at a price, just little higher to the December offer.

agendas. In the Western Balkans we have the cases of Albanian communities, acting for a combination of irredentism and clan based separatism, of Sandzak, of Republika Srpska (and – possibly – other Serb enclaves and communities). Fragmentation goes hand in hand with de-modernization – with tearing apart the social bonds of citizens' equality and normative rationality through spontaneous reduction of communal life to the social bonds of clan solidarity and kinship. The destruction of industrial economy, the large waves of refugees and emigrants after the conflicts, the development of criminal economy and corrupt institutional environment as compensatory mechanisms for the disintegration of modern institutions and civilian status reduce communal life to perverse forms of gangster-like traditional society.

De-modernization is deepened with **disintegration of societal elites**.[16] Modern technocrats – like Ante Markovic – have been replaced by authoritarian nationalists after 1990, modern middle class was replaced by war thugs and organized crime bosses, efficient administrators gave way to corrupt clan chiefs. Without reintegration of **modern reformist elites**, gaining critical mass against the forces of destruction, no process of adaptation – even moderate and formal – to the European mainstream could take place. Only modern elites could utilize an institutional system, based on formal rationality and the norms and procedures that follow. Traditional society elites – in particular organized crime and clan based elites – cannot sustain the very difference between corrupt behavior and legitimate behavior within the institutions. Institutional performance for the public good, based on administrative roles is beyond the comprehension of personalities dominated traditional hierarchies. We underline those widely known simple truths not for the purpose of sociological education. Without making a clear difference between both types of communal and institutional behavior – traditional and modern ones – no strategy for modern nation-building in the Western Balkans is possible, let alone the adaptation to the standards of postmodern Europe.

One more factor of societal importance should be added to this picture. That is the uneven **communal – national development**. We observe several distinct types of national development – and nationalist self-awareness in the Western Balkans. *First,* the established, 'old' nations like Serbia, with its national hegemony agenda defeated in the post-Yugoslav wars, with deep division lines inside on the issue of guilt for what has happened. Such a nation needs healing. *Second,* established, yet institutionally young and successful nations – like Croatia, boasting to be the only national community that has won the post-Yugoslav contest (Slovenia excluded). Democratization and stabilization are key strategic recommendation for this case. *Third,* young and dynamic, energetic national communities, rising towards their zenith of national establishing – like the Albanians are. Clear limits of ambitions, developmental assistance, assistance to democratization, special emphasis on respect to minorities and multicultural living are strategic priorities for the case. *Fourth,* young and fragile national projects in need for stabilization, legitimate status recognition, identity strengthening and successful integration into the regional context – Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs, Montenegrins… This is more or less mainstream nation building process, combining ethnic identity criteria with the criteria of citizenship and

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[16] Kosovo is best example to the case. The ex-communist elite (lead by Mahmud Bakali) of the 1970s – 1980s was more or less successfully transformed into the democratic elite of Ibrahim Rugova. It has successfully organized an alternative government – against the authoritarian rule of Belgrade. This government had command on informal, yet efficient systems of education, health care, tax collection. With the arrival of the KLA – and with the practical replacement of the old elite with commandos-gangster type of 'independence war heroes', Kosovo was sunk into organized crime and institutional chaos after 1999 – in contrast to the age of informal Rugova government – despite having freedom, KFOR, UNMIK and almost unlimited assistance from the international community.

civic equality. *Fifth*, but not least – all additional claims for communal emancipation and 'independence' should be stopped and redirected to full-fledged reintegration into the democratic national community.

Formulating Strategic Options for EU Action

In the context of dealing with communal and national destruction of the Western Balkans the EU has two basic options for a background strategy. The *first one* is the dominant European – Western strategy for **preventing violent change of borders and to support multiethnic – multicultural model of living and national development**. All efforts of the international community to end the conflicts, to repatriate refugees, to bring war criminals to court and to ensure ethnic communities' security in the post-conflict period are derivative from this basic strategy of sustaining multiethnic reality in this war torn region. This strategy is expensive, fragile and controversial – as the case of Kosovo exemplifies. The *second* possible strategic option for the EU and its allies is **transformation and reshaping of communities and borders** in an attempt to work out maximum ethnic homogeneity as tools to nation state stabilization and faster recovery. This is an option first introduced as an opportunity to reconstruct war-ravaged post-Yugoslav space by Dr. David Owen[17] who proposed summoning an international conference for the Balkans to decide the new borders and legitimize a new *status quo*. Such redesigning of the Balkans offers series of pragmatic benefits, in particular provided the nature of Balkan national mentality, deeply historicist and rooted into the ethnic identity of a nation. Such an approach – if decently applied – could also repair the evil and injustice made to the Balkans for more than a century, starting with the Berlin Congress of 1878, with the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, with both world wars, and ending up with the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. Such a project is placed by its nature into the Wilsonian tradition – of the famous 14 points plan for Europe's postwar settlement. Starting with this 14 points plan, however, all Wilsonian projects of sponsored geopolitical charity have few chances of implementation on European – including Balkan – soil.

The strategy of a 'Balkan conference' is difficult to implement in the Balkans of today for a number of reasons. *First*, if the international community finds it difficult to enforce the Kosovo independence, how much more tension will a full territorial redesign cause among all countries of the region? *Second*, if territorial design is possible, what number of national sovereignty claims will be endorsed? This question will reappear not only in case of ethnic diversity, but also in cases like the Albanian national question – how many Albanian states, and of what composition. *Third*, how could a consensus on territorial redesigning of the Western Balkans be extended to satisfy the interests of all countries of the region. A bad status quo on the Balkans is usually better than enforced change. *Last,* but not least, a 'Balkan conference' type of territorial redesign is possible in case of an united international community. The present day discord between Russia and the West on Kosovo is a clear indication that such a unity among 'Great Powers' is hard if impossible at all to achieve.

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[17] British statesman David Anthony Llewellyn Owen, Baron Owen, was appointed in 1992 as the EU co-chairman of the Conference for the Former Yugoslavia, along with Cyrus Vance, the former U.S. Secretary of State as the UN co-chairman. In 1995, he resigned. He is associated with a proposal for a "New Congress of Berlin," like the one convened by the Great Powers of the 19th Century, which redrew the map of the Balkans in 1878. His ideas first appeared in an article in Wall Street Journal dated March 13, 2001, during the crisis in Macedonia, entitled "To Secure Balkan Peace, Redraw the Map.

The absence a realistic chances to proceed with the 'Balkan conference' strategic option for borders redesign leaves open only the option to stick to the multiethnic – multicultural strategy for pacifying and integrating the Balkans into the European mainstream. It is a very expensive, very slow and controversial approach to transform the region. Multiculturalism is a communal principle, governing – to some degree of success - postmodern democratic societies, while on the Western Balkans we deal with war ravaged weak nations, stuck on the road between traditional society and modernity. This is a Sisyphus task to serve, and the chances of success lie only within developing a coherent and systemic strategic approach, well coordinated both technologically and politically. This should be an intermediate strategy for the Western Balkans, bringing the region to the doorstep of full membership into the EU.

The responsibility for the Western Balkans development after Kosovo's independence lies mostly on the EU. The EU is the only major international factor, capable – with the support of the US – to guarantee the integrated transformation of the region into part of the European mainstream. The post-independence development of the region will constitute the major test case for the ability of the EU to apply successfully its common security policy in resolving a complicated international problem. A defeat for Europe to successfully assist the post-independence transition will close the region into a long-term ghetto, generating poverty, crime and insecurity, emigration waves in Europe. An efficient stabilization and integration of the Western Balkans will constitute another major step of successful implementation of European model of democracy, development and globalization into the neighborhood of the core of the European community.

Getting Solutions on the Balkans: A Set of Recommendations

There are two sets of recommendations to the EU strategy on the Western Balkans in the Kosovo independence context. The **first** one applies to the intermediate aftermath of independence recognition process. The day after Kosovo's independence will be a really tough day for Europe. The **second** set of recommendations addresses the mid-term policies of the EU within the intermediate agenda of bringing the Western Balkans to the threshold of full membership.

I. The day after independent Kosovo.

1. Kosovo will be granted "conditional" or "supervised" independence. The EU should use this conditionality as a tool of enforcing satisfactory level of reform and stabilization of all aspects of life in the ex-province. Conditionality should be strictly observed and applied in particular in all fields of ethnic communal and individual human rights by Kosovo authorities and Kosovo citizens. Tolerating a wave of ethnic cleansing or destruction of cultural-religious heritage on behalf of international institutions will fully jeopardize the moral legitimacy of Kosovo independence recognition.

2. Conditionality of Kosovo independence should be 'reversible'. Supervisory practices should be re-imposed and re-enforced after once being lifted in case standards of institutional behavior are not observed by Pristina. The timing of this reversibility must be extended to the day of full membership of Kosovo into the EU. There were options discussed of Kosovo

gaining independence in stages[18] until full accession. The EU could apply such an approach in a flexible extension or reduction of independence status depending on the performance of Pristina in the reform agenda. The non-compliance with the conditions should lead to downgrading the level of relations.

3. The EU should be ready to strengthen the performance of KFOR peace-keeping and peace-enforcement, depending on the risk of inter-ethnic clashes after the independence recognition. With the Serbs' enclaves defending their status as parts of Serbia, clashes between them and Albanian majority paramilitary groups are very likely. KFOR must buffer efficiently between both sides for a shorter or longer period of time, before political decisions of the problems are effected. No precedents like the March riots of 2004 should be allowed to happen.

4. The EU authorities should be ready to prevent not only institutional support from Pristina to Albanian rebel groups outside Kosovo, but also any organized attempt for armed spill over to the neighboring countries from Kosovo soil. Without direct support from Kosovo spill over to neighboring territories is impossible. Local crises with Albanian communities in the neighboring countries are possible, but without military organization and transfer of arms from Kosovo damage control over those crises is easy.

5. To prevent spill over effects of Kosovo independence, the EU should augment the stability of neighboring countries. For Macedonia, the level of complexity of governance should be decreased as the 'Badinter majority' principle puts unbearable burden on the fragile Macedonian decision making system.[19] The crisis of 2001 was followed by the Ohrid agreement, presuming a complicated political system of *consensual democracy*, practiced so far in limited communities of postmodern nature. A flexible federal system (excluding the presumption of separation), rather than consensual democracy would better serve political realities in Macedonia.

6. Kosovo independence will serve as an organizational boost of organized crime networks of Albanians in the region. There will be no stabilization of the Balkan region, nor any decent government in Pristina, unless direct relationship between political institutions, clan chieftains and trafficking networks is weakened and organized crime is reduced. The EU should impose an authority of strict institutional control over the domestic security apparatus in Kosovo, plus longer term monitoring of customs.

7. The EU should undertake specific efforts to reduce the scope and impact of negative reactions to Kosovo independence in the region and throughout the international community. Brussels should make it clear to Moscow that the cooperation of Russia to resolve the West

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[18] The Balkan Commission Report of 2005 "The Balkans in Europe's Future", available at http://www.balkan-commission.org/activities/Report.pdf. The Commission advocated a four stage transition in the evolution of Kosovo's sovereignty. Accoridng to them Kosovo's sovereignty should develop from the status quo as defined by Resolution 1244 (stage one) to "independence without full sovereignty" (stage two) (allowing for reserved powers for the international community in the fields of human rights and minority protection), to the "guided sovereignty" (stage three) that Kosovo would enjoy while negotiating with the EU and finally to "shared sovereignty" (stage four) inside the EU.

[19] Robert Badinter (who also chaired the the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on the former Yugoslavia.in the 1990s) participated in drafting the Ohrid Agreement in 2001 that regulated the ethnic conflict in the country. The principle in this agreement introduces the often called the "Badinter" or "double majority" principle", whereby key decisions should be backed by a majority of both major ethnic groups in Macedonia in an intricate decision-making mechanism.

Balkan bias – Kosovo in particular – is a direct prerequisite for promoting the entire package of EU-Russia partnership. All Russian efforts to destabilize the region, based on alternative vision for Kosovo will be treated as a key obstacle to EU – Russia relations.

8. The EU should work hard to prevent antidemocratic – nationalist backlash in Serbia. While Belgrade claims for keeping Kosovo within Serbia's borders cannot be satisfied, the independence of Pristina should be considered the last change of borders within the ex-Yugoslav space. Serbia should receive official guarantees from Brussels and (possibly) from Washington for its territorial integrity and inviolability of borders. Serbs fear a chain reaction, coming out of the Kosovo precedent. With all its authority the international community, the EU in particular should categorically exclude such a risk from the agenda of the region.

9. The EU should be ready with a detailed plan for conflict management and conflict deterrence in case of a *de facto* split of Kosovo into Albanian 'mainland' and Serb enclaves plus the northern triangle. Positive scenarios in the aftermath of Kosovo independence are welcome. Pessimistic scenarios should be carefully considered and strategic measures to face them should be prepared.

II. Intermediate Strategy to Address Societal Maladies of the Balkans

1. The EU should prepare a framework model of economic recovery and economic growth of the Western Balkans. Poverty alleviation, creation of jobs, plans for systemic development of market infrastructure, physical infrastructure and human resources development. The experience of enforcing neo-liberal orthodoxy as an unchallenged model of economic transformation to post-communist Central and Eastern Europe should be reassessed and revised. Developing social welfare safety nets within the economic transformation process should be seriously considered. The alternative is additional depopulation and de-modernization of the entire region.

2. The 'inner circle' of benefits related to EU membership should be granted ASAP at citizens' level – visa facilitation, educational opportunities, access to EU programs close or equal to those of the citizens in the EU member states.

3. Flexible stimuli to the communities of democratic reformist at political, civic and local-communal level should be provided in order to encourage and empower the democratic civilian options for social and political development in Western Balkan societies. If left on their own, those societies will produce alternative forms of societal organization, related to traditional society values, clan structures, organized crime networks. We need to create privileged status to democracy in order to give it a chance.

4. The EU should encourage flexible formats of institutional political systems in the region, concerning: interethnic communal arrangements, transitional constitutional governments on the way of full-fledged democracy, federal and confederal structures of nation building. The EU should sponsor systematically the nation building process within the region and efficient institutions build up. There's no logical or historical opportunity to join the postmodern – post-national realm of the EU before and without stabilizing national communities and national institutions.

5. There should be wide application of Euro-regions principle and practices – in particular among states hosting larger groups of one and the same ethnicity. Euro-regions, if funded and developed properly may prove viable substitute to change of borders in favor of ethnic-national unification.

6. The EU should stick to a flexible system of status promotion of Western Balkan countries on their way to full membership.

Successful integration of the Western Balkans into the EU mainstream should be considered not simply – and only from the perspective of local nations' benefits from membership, or from the perspective of Europe's strategic aims. Integrating the Western Balkans changes Europe and adapts Europe to the challenge of further enlargement and promotion of the European social and developmental model to the East.