

LSE SU Albanian Society public lecture

“Kosovo’s Independence: One Year On”

By:

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Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

The people of Kosovo were spared outright genocide in 1999, ten years ago, when the 78-day U.S.-led NATO operation brought an end to the Serbian onslaught in Kosovo, which had left 12,000 Kosovar Albanians dead and thousands missing, half of the population violently deported, and close to 130,000 homes burned or leveled. After Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, this was the fourth war of aggression waged by Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia during the 1990s against its fellow federal units of the former Yugoslavia.

A Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Princip, triggered World War I in 1914. Another Serbian nationalist, Mr. Milosevic, the Butcher of the Balkan, as he has been dubbed, concluded the past century with wars aimed at creating a Greater Serbia.

Kosovo and Serbia had for centuries been under Ottoman rule. Kosovo was briefly liberated from Ottoman rule, before being conquered by Serbia, which had won its independence a few decades earlier.

Decades of Serbian and Yugoslav rule followed, with varying degrees of autonomy for Kosovo. The 1974 Constitution of Yugoslavia saw Kosovo becoming a federal entity, with veto rights at the federal level. Milosevic illegally stripped Kosovo of its federal entity status, before submitting Kosovo, during the nineties, the last decade of the last century, to outright occupation.

The political struggle of the Kosovars for freedom and independence, led by the independence leader, President Ibrahim Rugova, and the Kosovo Liberation Army's armed struggle, gave birth to Kosovo's freedom in June 1999. Almost a decade of international administration followed, before Kosovo declared independence a year ago yesterday, after a long international process to determine the status of Kosovo was concluded, under the chairmanship of UN Special Envoy for the Status of Kosovo, and the stewardship of the Contact Group, comprised of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany, and Russia.

One year ago, the democratically-elected leaders of the people of Kosovo declared Kosovo an independent and sovereign state. As proclaimed in our Declaration of Independence, the act of independence, "reflects the will of our people and it is in full accordance with the recommendations of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and his Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement." Both the recommendations and the comprehensive proposal of the UN Special Envoy, and laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2008, Mr. Ahtisaari, were fully supported by the UN Secretary-General.

Let me briefly share some thoughts with you on Kosovo's recent achievements.

Firstly on the institutional set-up.

Kosovo has all the attributes of nationhood. A flag and an anthem. A President, a Parliament, a Government, democratically elected; a clear separation of labour and powers between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. A vibrant democratic system.

Kosovo has adopted its Constitution, which defines the Republic as “an independent, sovereign, democratic, unique and indivisible state”. The constitution enshrines the key provisions of the Ahtisaari package, which grant the minority Serb community unprecedented rights and privileges. The language of half a dozen percent of the population of Kosovo, Serbia that is, is official throughout the country, just like Albanian, the language of over 90 percent of the population. Serbs and other minorities are guaranteed over-representation in the local and national institutions.

Scores of laws have been passed by the Parliament, pursuant to the Constitution and the Ahtisaari Package, thus legislating all areas of vital importance for a functioning state and society. Most of the Kosovo legislation is in full conformity with the EU laws, which will make the job of our eventual adherence to the European Union easier and faster.

The security architecture of the Republic of Kosovo is all but completely built. We have an excellent police force, arguably the best in the region, and are in the process of building up the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), a lightly armed force, being trained by NATO. We have created the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, as well as the National Security Council.

The President of Kosovo has set up the Consultative Council for Communities, which provides a mechanism for regular exchange between the Communities and the Government of Kosovo.

In terms of legislation, our Constitution provides for the so-called double majority voting governing vital interests for the communities. The majority of the parliament's deputies present and voting holding seats reserved or guaranteed for the non-Albanian communities should vote before laws in areas of vital interest can be passed and enacted. (See Article 81, page 29).

The 17-member strong Government of Kosovo has three ministers coming from minority representatives, two of whom are Serbs.

We have a very modern legislation governing the economy of Kosovo, largely in compliance with EU standards.

Kosovo has got a lot to offer to foreign investors: mining, energy, as well as agriculture, are the main areas, with a lot of potential. Last but not least, a young and entrepreneurial population.

There are a lot of challenges ahead for our country, as it embarks upon its second year of existence as an independent state.

Our economy has been growing around 5% annually, but this has happened from a low base, after a long period of disinvestment during the Serbian occupation, in the wake of the devastation caused by the war, as well as in light of the uncertainty of status in the run-up to independence declaration last year. The unemployment rate is around 40%.

The Government of Kosovo has invested considerably in the school and road infrastructures. A lot remains to be done, though.

We have an overstretched health-care system, which needs reforming and a lot of investment.

The social fabric of society as such – badly damaged by the conflict and the war -- needs time to be re-established.

The international community has been generous with the people of Kosovo in the past decade. Last July around 1.2 billion Euros were pledged to Kosovo by the EU, the USA, as well as individual countries in Europe and elsewhere around the globe.

Kosovo is an independent country. But ours is a supervised independence initially, in accordance with the Ahtisaari Package. There is still a considerable international presence, both civilian and military in Kosovo. They have got roles to play to, and duties to discharge, especially in the areas of rule of law and security. These are enshrined in our Constitution.

The transition of Kosovo to independence was by and large smooth. We have encountered some problems with the international civilian presences. I say presence (in plural), because we have still remnants of UNMIK, a mission that is winding down, and an EU-led mission (EULEX) which is winding up. UNMIK's mission is long overdue. The UN Mission has no place in our Constitution, but EULEX has.

Serbia has sponsored parallel Serb structures in parts of Kosovo, especially in the north. The aim is to challenge the very existence of Kosovo's independent nationhood.

The Serbian leadership in Belgrade has renewed lately calls for Serbs to set fire to border and customs posts along the Kosovo-Serbia border. The Serbian Government is thus demonstrating that it is encouraging and even sponsoring violence in its dispute with us, contrary to their earlier pledges that they would use only

diplomatic and political means to challenge Kosovo's independence.

Serbia has in addition, through the UN, referred the issue of Kosovo's declaration of independence to the International Court of Justice.

Serbia is trying to portray itself as an aggrieved party in the dispute. As if it was Kosovo, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia who initiated wars of aggression against Serbia, and not the other way round.

Kosovo has declared its independence, and been recognized as such by 54 countries. Kosovo is a sui generis, a position that is widely accepted in the international community.

The United Kingdom recognized us less than 24 hours after our Independence Declaration. So did France, the United States of America, Albania, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Costa Rica. 47 other recognitions followed.

The process of recognitions will continue. We need this so as to be able to engage fully with the international community. We have fully accepted the duty of responsible membership in the international community.

Meanwhile, we continue with our efforts to consolidate the independence of our country, both internally and externally.

We have declared our commitment to abide by the international legal obligations and principles of international community that mark the relations among states. Kosovo has already applied for membership in the International Monetary Fund and the World

Bank and intends to apply, in due course, to join the United Nations and other international organizations.

We have assumed our international obligations, including those concluded on our behalf by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, and treaty and other obligations of the former Yugoslavia to which we are bound as a former constituent part.

For reasons of culture, geography and history, Kosovo's future lies within the European family of democracies. Therefore, we are committed to implement the reforms required and pursue the goal of full membership in the European Union as soon as feasible. Similarly, we are fully committed to joining NATO and will take all steps necessary to this end.

In terms of security, Kosovo is committed to peace and stability in Southeast Europe. Kosovo's nationhood is an indispensable factor of peace and stability in the region.

In order to strengthen friendly relations and cooperation with other states, the first ten embassies of the Republic of Kosovo were established during 2008, including our Embassy here in London. (By the way, our Embassy is located in Mayfair, at 15 Stratton Street, W1) A dozen Kosovo embassies will be established during this year, in Europe and elsewhere around the globe.

In an independent Kosovo there is room and opportunity for all, the Albanian majority and the minorities, including the Serbs. Independence has brought peace of mind to the overwhelming majority of Kosovars, stability to the southeast Europe, and prospects for European integration for all of us in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Kosovo celebrated its first birthday as an independent country yesterday. We, here in London, celebrated too. Our Embassy to the UK, whose head I have the honour of being, organized a party at the May Fair Hotel. The room was packed with more than 300 attendees, from countries that have recognized as well as from those that have not yet recognized us, as well as representatives of the UK government and society, and the Kosovar and Albanian diasporas.

Leaders from around the world sent messages of congratulations to our President and Prime Minister and the people of Kosovo.

Queen Elizabeth II and Foreign Secretary Miliband did this, too. They, as well as other leaders, including US President Obama, stressed the achievements of Kosovo, and pledged their continued support for our country.

“Kosovo’s declaration of independence one year ago today opened a new chapter in its history. The last year has seen huge progress. Kosovo’s leaders have established lasting democratic institutions”, Foreign Secretary Miliband said yesterday. “Kosovo is consolidating its place as a sovereign international actor”, he went on to say.

Let me conclude by saying that the people of Kosovo are proud of their historic achievements, resilient as we confront the present and the future challenges, but also hopeful of a bright future for Kosovo and indeed the entire region.

The wars I referred to at the beginning of this talk, that notorious legacy that has caused so much suffering to the people of the

Balkans, should go down in history as something that should never happen again.

Kosovo and Serbia, and indeed other newly emerged nations in our part of the world, should be able to live in peace and prosperity as part of the united Europe, on a par with one another, and in no other way.

Thank you for your attention.