

THE FUTURE OF KOSOVA: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The necessity of resolving the final status of Kosova to enhance the stabilization of the Balkan region was the dominant theme of an international conference entitled *The Future of Kosova* held at CSIS on Tuesday, November 19, 2002. The event, hosted by the CSIS Eastern Europe Project, the National Albanian American Council (NAAC), and the Dayton Peace Accords Project (DPAP), called on the international community to begin addressing the important issue of Kosova's final status.

Will history recognize the George W. Bush administration for having resolved the most persistent Balkan conflict? Or will continuing ambiguity and indecision over Kosova's status lead to renewed tensions in the Balkans?

The failure to address the final-status issue is becoming a destabilizing factor. Most conference participants agreed that the United States should take the lead in removing ambiguities and devising lasting solutions. It was established that the European Union cannot handle the issue without U.S. involvement, as Washington is the only credible broker in the region. Efforts should also be concentrated on designing an effective institutional system whereby Kosova can demonstrate its capability for self-governance and for regional economic and political cooperation. Kosova must also reject ethnic divisions and develop a clear plan for the protection of minorities.



The EU has expended significant resources on trying to preserve the status quo in the Balkans. However, guest speaker Louis Sell, a professor at the University of Maine and author of a recent book on Yugoslavia, emphasized that Serbia's integration into Europe will not be accelerated by trying to regain control over Kosova. The EU's track record in the Balkans—one of ambiguity and lackadaisical conduct—is generating fear, uncertainty, and instability among Kosova's majority population.

The U.S. administration and the international community as a whole must start thinking seriously about Kosova's status. "By fault of inaction, a process will take place that will be unsatisfactory to a substantial portion of [Kosova's] population," stated R. Bruce Hitchner, chairman of the Dayton Peace Accords Project. "All in all, the status question has been used more to evade responsibilities of governance than to actually create an atmosphere and conditions for resolving the issue of status," stated Veton Surroi, editor of the *Koha Ditore* daily in Prishtina. "Ultimately, self-determination is the only way to ensure security," according to Janusz Bugajski, co-chair of the conference, and director of the CSIS Eastern Europe Project.

Congressman Elliot Engel (D-New York) contributed to the concluding remarks of the conference. Former senator, Robert Dole, sent a letter of endorsement. Senator Gordon Smith (R-Oregon) also sent a statement. A comprehensive policy paper on achieving Kosova's final status will be available on the CSIS website in February. To obtain a conference program, please visit the East Europe pages of the CSIS website at www.csis.org/ee.

This issue of Europe East covers the recently held "The Future of Kosova" conference, which highlighted the need for the resolution of Kosova's final status. Highlights of the conference are featured within this issue. CSIS would like to thank the National Albanian American Council (NAAC) and the Dayton Peace Accords Project (DPAP) for co-sponsoring and co-organizing this conference with the Center. We would also like to thank John B. MacDonald of John B. MacDonald & Sons for his generous contribution to the conference. Please see back cover for picture information.

THE DEBATE

The “Future of Kosova” conference held on November 19, 2002, at CSIS in Washington, D.C., illustrated that there is no consensus on the final status of Kosova. Most Albanians seek an independent Kosova; the majority of Serbs want to retain Kosova as a part of Serbia; the U.S. administration does not have a clear policy; and the Europeans predominately cite the historical example of reconciliation set by Germany and France as a model to follow. The conference welcomed opposing viewpoints and the debate was often heated.

One major point of agreement at the conference underscored that the final status of Kosova cannot be postponed indefinitely. Kosova must not remain an object of dependency and a bone of contention that hinders the region’s overall progress. Recent history has demonstrated that robust intervention pays off in the Balkans rather than hesitation. There is an acute need for facilitating a political process designed to determine Kosova’s future status.

The chairpersons of the conference were Janusz Bugajski, director of East European Studies at CSIS; Martin Vulaj, executive director of the National Albanian American Council (NAAC); and R. Bruce Hitchner, chairman of the Dayton Peace Accords Project and a Laurence S. Rockefeller visiting fellow at Princeton University.

Conference speakers included Donald Braum, deputy director for Kosovo at the U.S. Department of State; Skender Hyseni, principal political adviser to the president of Kosova; Louis Sell, professor at the University of Maine; and Veton Surroi, editor and publisher of *Koha Ditore* in Prishtina.

PERSPECTIVES AND ISSUES

U.S. Perspectives and Policy Approaches

Although a lot has been accomplished in Kosova since 1999, the United States still has not defined its final position on the status of Kosova. The current administration does remain committed to resolving the issue of Kosova despite the many other pressing issues on its foreign policy agenda. Before the rest of the international community can develop a coherent policy on what Kosova’s final status should be, the United States must develop a more articulate and effective policy toward the region as a whole. Until this happens, Kosova will remain in limbo and tied to UN Resolution 1244. Such a status quo is likely to generate instability and will hamper the restructuring processes within Kosova.

It is evident that political, economic, and social progress ultimately hinges on the nature of Kosova’s final status. Currently, all sectors of Kosovar society are influenced by the lack of a resolution for final status, and the uncertainty and ambiguity do not elicit public confidence. Regardless of Washington’s final position on the status of Kosova, the objective should be to establish a safe and secure environment that will have a stabilizing effect on the rest of the Balkan region.

One of the non-governmental panelists proposed that the United States should develop a dual-track approach for resolving the final-status question. The first track would focus on Kosova itself, the development of local self-government, and an expansion of local authority. The second track would concentrate on the need for dialogue between Kosova and its neighbors to develop their political and economic relations and to ensure that greater stability is fostered throughout the region. If Kosova gains its independence, as many of its citizens desire, then it will have to accept Serbia as an immediate neighbor; hence the process of cooperation will need to develop early.

The lingering ambiguity about final status threatens to overwhelm and once again destabilize the region. However, the issue is not an intractable problem. The debate must include a thorough consideration of both means and ends.

UN Resolution 1244

“UN Resolution 1244” was one of the defining phrases of the conference. Panelists and participants repeatedly mentioned 1244 without discussing what the resolution and the mission statement of the UN Interim administration in Kosova (UNMIK) actually outlined for the region.

Essentially, UN Resolution 1244 is an open-ended resolution that does not provide the necessary details as to how, when, and by whom the future status of Kosova will be determined. In order to determine the final status of Kosova, the UN must assess its contributions to the restructuring of Kosova since the formation of UNMIK. It must identify its successes and failures in order to create a stable society within the region.

Many conference participants used the ambiguities of Resolution 1244 to fortify their respective viewpoints. Some participants believed that the indecision over the final status of Kosova implies the UN’s intention that Kosova should remain part of Serbia. Conversely, other participants indicated that Resolution 1244 provides Kosovars with ample reasons to pursue independence and that the international community would encourage such an approach. If international actors truly intended for Kosova to permanently remain part of Serbia, then it can be argued that this would have been stated within the objectives of Resolution 1244. But because it is not, then independence

may be the ultimate intention or consequence of UN involvement.

UNMIK

The UN has overseen many successes in Kosova, including the stemming of violence between Serbs and Albanians, a first democratic general election in 2001, and the formation of a new government. In addition, Kosova's economy has begun to rejuvenate, albeit slowly, which has led to a small improvement in living standards.

Despite the successes, there have been numerous failures. One year after the election, the institutions at the national level (president, prime minister, and parliament) are only just beginning to function. Little real authority has been handed over by UNMIK at the municipal level. The UN must recognize its shortcomings and seek to resolve them, so when final status is determined, the territory will not be thrown back into uncertainty. Although Kosova has celebrated its first democratic election, the government has failed to pass significant legislation, such as the funding of social and educational programs. Kosova has also failed to establish effective and efficient institutions and structures that would enable the government to implement its policies. Kosova is lacking fundamental resources vital to successful governmental operations, including office supplies and qualified staff. In addition, the Parliament in Prishtina only meets once a week, which does not provide sufficient time to develop structures and legislation.

Both UNMIK and the elected Kosovar government are working under self-impeding conditions. Most Kosovar Albanians believe that social, political, and economic advances cannot be realized in Kosova without advancements made on status. However, UNMIK claims that without these advancements, the status question cannot be resolved. This paralyzing path is preventing Kosova from advancing democracy.

Finally, in seeking to encourage the development of democratic reforms, the UN has not granted enough control to the Kosovars. Kosova's authorities should be granted responsibility over all issues that are currently under UNMIK's control with the exception of Kosova's relations with other states. UNMIK has reserved the right to decisionmaking on the budget, security, cooperation with neighbors, the EU, public sectors of the economy, and the court system. With this, UNMIK is doing more to strengthen itself than to strengthen Kosovar institutions. UNMIK is not an elected body and it is therefore unaccountable. UNMIK should assume a macro-managerial position, while transferring power to Kosovar institutions.

Mitrovica

The ethnically divided city of Mitrovica was also a concern of conference participants. The city is divided between Serbs in the north and Albanians in the south and is currently under UN control. According to one panelist, Mitrovica is

considered a fault line, and because partition has not been ruled out as a solution, there is a potential that territorial partition could further destabilize the area. The final status of Mitrovica needs to be addressed in conjunction with the final status of Kosova in order to avoid future conflicts.

Economy

Economically, Kosova remains handicapped in terms of international assistance from institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the EU. The economy and, more important, fiscal policy cannot be effective until authority is granted to the elected government to develop policies that will help to steer Kosova's economy in a positive direction that will lead to growth and an increase in employment. Economic relations between Kosova and other Balkan states should be enhanced. Regional integration, in terms of bilateral treaties and trade agreements among other Balkan states, has been promoted. Kosova still cannot benefit from these developments, however, because its final status has not yet been determined.

Ethnic Tensions

Even in the presence of UNMIK, ethnic tensions between Serbs and Albanians remain and are further fueled by the lack of final status. The UN alone cannot be expected to push for discussions on final status until Kosova can prove that it has developed into a functioning, tolerant, and multiethnic society. In the meantime, violence among Serbs and Albanians, although much reduced, continues. The recent bombings of Serbian churches and the slayings of an Albanian mayor and his colleagues in October demonstrate that ethnic tensions are still present. Serbs and Albanians need to feel that they will be able to live in Kosova without fear of violence or conflict.

Belgrade

Some conference participants discussed the Belgrade's negative involvement in determining the final status of Kosova. A productive dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina in addressing the issues of reconstruction and final status has been clearly absent. Observers view Belgrade's involvement as conditional, with cooperation occurring only when it serves to advance Belgrade's agenda. There is no coherent plan for Serbia's involvement nor a productive dialogue with the government in Prishtina. This generates suspicion and resentment and reinforces the conflictive division between Kosova and Belgrade.

Washington

The path to Europe goes through Washington, and U.S. leadership is imperative for Kosova's status to be resolved. The United States should take the lead in reassessing present policies and in trying to build consensus in more efficient ways in which both democratic governance and resolution of final status can be advanced.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to several NGO panelists, the most viable solution for resolving Kosova's status is consistent progress toward institutionalizing independence and Kosovar self-reliance, combined with a permanent NATO security guarantee. An independent Kosova with a legitimate and credible government can make an important and long-term contribution to Balkan security.

A decision on Kosova's final status would serve U.S. interests, as it would stabilize the Balkan region and provide the United States with a useful ally in the anti-terror campaign. The Bush administration would also be remembered in history for bringing resolution to the most persistent and destabilizing Balkan problem.

In order to avoid long-term dependence on outside agencies or a destabilizing spiral of conflict, self-determination and independence for Kosova could become a principal objective of the international community. This step would have positive symbolic, political, and security ramifications. It would restore Kosovar confidence in the international community and would prevent a potential radicalization of Albanian politics as long-term ambiguity on the status question can undermine the region's democrats.

To ensure stability and security, UN functions must be diminished and the Kosovar government must be empowered to govern rather than to simply consult with international agencies. Only such a transformation can create an effective democratic legislature, maximize public initiatives, and encourage economic investment. It would also give dynamism to the development of a Kosovar state identity that is trans-ethnic, multi-religious, and pan-European.

Recommendations for the United States: The United States must regain a leadership role in resolving Kosova's final status. Washington can gradually reduce its troop commitment to Kosova, but this should not result in a political withdrawal that will be perceived as abandonment by the majority of Kosovars. The United States should play a supervisory role in key areas while paving a clear path toward Kosova's final status.

Recommendations for Kosovars: Kosovar leaders must do more than simply speak about independence. If the international community is not ready to decide on Kosova's final status, then the Kosovar community should reach a consensus and display unity on the statehood question while demonstrating its capabilities for self-governance.

Kosovars must take more responsibility, develop institutions, reject ethnic divisions, and develop a clear plan for the protection of minorities.

A program for the protection of Kosova's cultural heritage, including churches, religious shrines, and historic monuments, should be established. In addition, Kosovar leaders should reach out to the Serb community within Kosova, visit Orthodox churches and make a political statement that Serbs are an essential part of the state.

To facilitate much-needed economic development, trust in the banking system must be promoted in order to move money out of the shadow economy. There is no history of trust in the banking system and a strategy must be carefully developed. Clearly, this will not be an easy task given the lack of final status.

Recommendations for the International Community: The international community needs to take stock of its actions. Delay has never worked in the past, but has often proved counter-productive. Washington continues to be viewed as the only credible broker in the area. The United States and Europe must work together and place the issue of Kosova's final status on the table.

Picture on Page One: Front row (left to right): Donald Braum, deputy director for Kosovo, U.S. Department of State; Skender Hyseni, principal political adviser to the president of Kosova; Congressman Elliot Engel; R. Bruce Hitchner, chairman, Dayton Peace Accords Project. Back row (left to right): Louis Sell, professor at the University of Maine; Janusz Bugajski, director of East European Studies at CSIS; and Martin Vulaj, executive director of the National Albanian American Council. Guest speaker Veton Surroi is not pictured. For more information on panelists and participants, please see the conference program at www.csis.org/ee.

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