

**CENTER FOR
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**GOOD NEWS FROM KOSOVO:
ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

WELCOME AND MODERATOR:
JANUS BUGAJSKI,
DIRECTOR, CSIS NEW EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES PROJECT,
SENIOR FELLOW, CSIS EUROPE PROGRAM

SPEAKERS:
HIS EXCELLENCY FATMIR SEJDIU,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

HIS EXCELLENCY HASHIM THACI,
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

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(Remarks made in Albanian are delivered via translator.)

JANUSC BUGAJSKI: Okay, good morning, everyone. Thank you all for coming. Welcome to CSIS. We have about an hour, so we're going to try and get through as much as possible and I'm going to be very brief.

Let me begin by saying we had good news from Serbia yesterday and, today, we have good news from Kosovo and I have the pleasure of introducing and welcoming the two top leaders from Europe's newest state, the Republic of Kosovo. As you know, it's been a very busy year. Independence declared in February followed up international recognition by the United States and most of the EU countries, I think now 43 or so countries have recognized Kosovo. A new constitution was passed last month and other important legislation is in the works and efforts now on the way for Kosovo to join various international organizations.

Also, as you know, Kosovo faces many challenges. I'm sure we'll cover some of this today, a restive Serbian minority, still the refusal of Belgrade to recognize Kosovo's independence, the slowness of transforming the U.N. mission into an EU mission and, of course, poor economic – consistently poor economic conditions amongst the very vibrant young population. I'm not going to list everything, a lot of these are going to come up, I'm sure, during our talk.

No biographies, let me just introduce, first of all, His Excellency Fatmir Sejdiu, the president of Kosovo, and His Excellence Hashim Thaci, the prime minister of Kosovo. The president will be first. We have simultaneous translation and I believe your headsets are already set to the right channel, according to your language. So without further ado, let me hand over to the president.

PRESIDENT FATMIR SEJDIU: Thank you, Mr. Bugajski. Honorable ladies and gentlemen, it is a very important for me and the Prime Minister Thaci to be here together and present here some of the new visions of the progress of Kosovo in this period which is of great importance for us. I think that we are witnesses of – of the participation in a very important process that Kosovo went through which was the process of the political status by overcoming and going through very difficult situations, facing very big challenges and very tangible situations as well. But I can also say that Kosovo, during these years, has witnessed, in the best possible way, its maturity and capacity to face the situations which have been extremely challenging and in different periods have had its own burden in the process to make sometimes – causes sometimes a dilemma.

It has been very clear for us that we have had mandate of the citizens of Kosovo to start a coordinated action with the international – internationals, especially the United States and the EU so that we could work to make a peaceful definition of Kosovo status. The framework set up before with Resolution 1244 and the international mission in Kosovo, civilian and military, was,

at the beginning, a very good inspiration in the process of the development and setting up of democratic institutions through which Kosovo could go through nine years to show its energy and dedication that it is essentially oriented that in its final project to realize it through a peaceful way and it is connected also with the period of difficulties we went through of an armed struggle with tragic results and of resistance necessary to save the people of Kosovo with the special and the extraordinary of NATO in Kosovo to save its disintegration.

We went in this process together. We have worked together. We have moved together and at the same – when the Security Council, the general secretary gave the mandate to Ahtisaari – President Ahtisaari – we started on this process in a very good cooperation in another process together with the three – with the troika. We have had difficulties by – and some roadblocks by the Russian Federation but at last, on February 17, 2008, we gained independence. During this period, the unity of the team that led the process has expressed the cohesion – political cohesion – of the political interests of the citizens of Kosovo with a single vision to make Kosovo into a democratic country of all citizens, a country which would respect the freedom and rights of the people, that will have a very good care for the minorities, especially the Serb minority.

The project of President Ahtisaari, though it has not been supported, generally, with a general – in unison, it has been supported by most of the countries of the Security Council and the democratic countries. And on this basis, the Kosovo mission – Missions proclaimed the independence of Kosovo which refers to a very important moment of the development – of new developments in our country. An independent, democratic Kosovo as an articulation of the will of its people, of the majority and the respect for the minorities – that has specific respect for the democratic inspirations of the people. It has the – to be – it aspires to become member of your Atlantic – that is NATO and EU. We have coordinated our efforts so that in the best way, we express our joy in the – important that we have been waiting for centuries.

It has been – it is very interesting – important to point out that most of the population of Kosovo, the majority of which is Albanian, but others as well, enjoy – express their joy at the – for the independence and they have expressed it. We manifested our joy of what we call the pleasure – the satisfaction that we have to close all this process in a dignified way and respect all the feelings of all the other people who might also have a different perspective. We are very much dedicated to implement the Ahtisaari project. We have very quickly done – passed the constitution of Kosovo constitution, which has an essential content which is closely connected with two main ideas.

The first one, the first level, within it, are – we find all the best – the most important principles of the modern constitutions, contemporary constitutions, and on the second, a combination – reasonable combination of the fundamental projects of Ahtisaari project as a guarantee to the – to the situation of the minority – the respect of minorities in the country. The constitution was approved in June in great cooperation between the opposition and the position with all the communities of minorities in the country with international community, I see on and other mechanisms we have reached to approve a series of laws, 41 of them which fill up the laws and other obligations from the Ahtisaari project.

This is part of the – part of the great work that we have done so far. It is – a will – a testament for the new developments for the – putting into effect this project. We say that within – overnight, we can change – we cannot say that we change overnight the life of the people, that we can relieve them of all of their concerns and go into a paradise life, but for us, it is for important, that we should understand the challenges practically, to cope with them realistically, to deal with them one-by-one and at the same time, to have to have a proactive action – to get a proactive action.

We are very much pleased of the fact that we have the support of the donors. We will move forward more rapidly in the most important points of our plan and we have very much – we will very much set up that independent Kosovo. This expresses the – the internationals support us and we want to say, to stress, to point out that we have to be recognized by other countries that probably are in the process of studying the procedures or other aspects but I think that you – that are in specific contacts with them and we are doing a parallel work, also, to work together so that – in unison – so that Kosovo will be a member of the international organisms, which are some of the two or three essential challenges that are facing right now.

In Kosovo, still, there is a process of hesitation of part of the Serb community. This part is in the hands of the policies followed by so far – by Belgrade. This part is, at the same time, a – (inaudible) – prey to the rhetorics, severe rhetorics in relations with Kosovo that has had so far. And this part, I'll say, take the liberty to say, especially for the parallel structures, does not help the stability in the country, peace, rule of law, integration because the most essential is to keep it in a stagnant situation to create illusions as if the question of the Kosovo has not ended so that they think that play the role – the role which is the need to accept another practical reality, which is our stand. Our stand is that these people, in Kosovo in general, must integrate in a joint process as we have to develop the policies, have proactive projects, especially economic ones, but also other projects which are connected with the clarification of the model of the democratic state of Kosovo and the extension of possibilities of incorporation of their work and themselves into the daily life of the country.

In Kosovo, the Serbs have representation in the parliament, in the government, the prime minister will say more in this direction but at the same time, I can that in Kosovo, they – we have a policy which has the feelings and it has invested, essentially, to have a good rapport with our neighbors, with the countries in the region, and also to have good rapport, relations also with Serbia in the future. We hope that we'll have good return in the new government – a new stand in the new government in Kosovo so that, as it has been pointed out, as a person, I'm saying, President Tadic, European tendencies, and he has to prove this. And it can be proved with what can be connected with the respect of the process of new realities in Southeastern Europe of avoiding investments – interfering investments in Kosovo and accepting the concept of good cooperation. This is our stand.

And another important element is, the conclusion as soon as possible, of the new configuration process of UNMIC in Kosovo, so that as it is under – as it is for seen by taking over by EULEX and cooperation with the EULEX and with – they will have good history – good story in Kosovo because the EULEX, I think, will have a good presence of European Union, the

United States, and other countries so that they will speed up the processes of the positive developments in the independence and sovereign Republic of Kosovo.

This is what I would like to say. We'll talk further, but I would like to point that I am very extremely honored that together with the prime minister and foreign minister, we are having a historic visit in the United States. The meetings we had with President Bush, the State Secretary Rice, noting – (inaudible) – with the deputy secretary of the treasury and other personalities who are – continues as powerful support in this transitional period. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. BUGAJSKI: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER HASHIM THACI: Honorable Mr. Bugajski, honorable ladies and gentlemen, the president pointed out that Kosovo is on the way of progress and it is making extraordinary progress in the six months after we proclaimed our country a sovereign, democratic country, independent, democratic country. After the long, arduous process of sacrifices of the direct dialogue with the international support of the United States and the EU and the participation of Russia, we came to the conclusion that the only solution for Kosovo is the proclamation, the coordinated proclamation of independence, which took place in February, 2008, which is the respect of the will – of the full will of the – of the Kosovo people for a democratic, independent country.

All this process has been done in close cooperation with the United States of America, with other Western countries of the EU, with NATO, with a pledge to – for the continuous presence of NATO and Western countries in our countries. It has been a successful management of the proclamation of independence, but also of the celebrations and the festivals because of the – what we have done for centuries to wait for this proclamation and we do not want the idea of the minorities to leave the country, but at the same time I would like to say that I'm at the head of the government of Kosovo to serve members of my government and one is from the Turkish minority. And we are aiming at strengthening the participation of the minorities. Soon after that, we started with the implementation of the President Ahtisaari's plan for us and for the international community. The Western countries' was the best plan possible, more acceptable and I would say that could be implemented in the best way.

We have started to work on it in the best way. We are working with greater responsibility in unison as policy and as citizens and we have made important steps forwards which was realized – the reality is we have the constitution now which guarantees the rights of the minorities in the most affirmative way possible, but at the same time we have continued with full success with the organization of conferences, the donors conference from which Kosovo gained a full support of the donors of about \$2 billion, which was a project. It was the projects, it was our responsibility, it was our vision, it was the framework of the – the budgetary framework that we had and, above all, the installation of a new good governance in Kosovo so that international investors could trust us in this pledge.

In this period of donations will be the period – will be a two-year period which would be very important for Kosovo so that Kosovo improves economically. We as a government have pledged that for every cent, we'll have accountability. We'll have regular contacts about the reforms. The country of Kosovo has been recognized by 43 countries – two-thirds of the EU countries, two-thirds of NATO countries, seven countries of G-8 – but these recognitions will continue in the future. We are working intensively with all our friends so that this process can be intensified.

We have installed in Kosovo, democratic institutions, effective ones. Legal infrastructure is according to all Western standards. We have installed the rule of law and we are pledged that we will have zero tolerance for negative influences like corruption, et cetera. We have excellent relations with the neighbor countries – Albania, Macedonia – we have started to solve this problem in Montenegro be also recognized by Macedonia, and we have very good relations of cooperating with Montenegro and we are expecting very quick recognition by Montenegro as well.

We are also pledging to have very good relations in the future with Serbia. The democratic world had a very good news yesterday, the arrest of Karadzic – but Belgrade has to work more to arrest all other criminals who have committed crimes in Bosnia, Kosovo and elsewhere. We are continuing to work so that we build all of the legal infrastructure which will create security for the international investors so that they would come and be safe there. Kosovo has great possibilities, possibilities which we have pledged to create the safety and security based on the legal framework so that we'll have powerful investments.

At the same time, we are investing in reforms: education reform, energy reform, healthcare reform, and all infrastructure and all aspects for the beginning of the economic development of Kosovo and, in the end, I'd like to point out that Kosovo today is an independent, sovereign state – a success for the entire region. It will bring peace, stability, and opening our perspectives for the entire region so that it will integrate in NATO and the European Union. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. BUGAJSKI: Okay, we have about 20, 25 minutes question time. I want you to please keep your questions or comments very, very brief. State your name and affiliation and we have microphones that are circulating around so be patient. First question please. Over here, of course – needs no introduction, but introduce yourself anyway.

Q: Thank you, Janusz – Edward Joseph, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Mr. President, Prime Minister – (foreign language) – congratulations. Gentlemen, Dr. Bugajki and Prime Minister Thaci both mentioned the arrest of Radovan Karadzic yesterday in Belgrade. I am wondering if either of you see that arrest as potentially relieving pressure on Belgrade with respect to its position on Kosovo and if you are concerned about the possible action in the International Court of Justice over the decision which could postpone recognition further – finally, anything that Kosovo can do itself without help of the United States and other countries to get more countries to recognize – (foreign language).

PRES. SEJDIU: I would like to give questions and answers. We would not like to leave Karadzic's arrest with the important visit of the Kosovo delegation here in Washington, but I can say that it is over a decade that Serbia, with all its governments, has hidden, given shelter to, and had these world criminals. And the prime minister said that it is not the Karadzic example alone, but there are many other people who we are very much convinced and I have pointed it out in my talks with the representatives of other countries and that the Serbian government knows where they are and, at the same time, I can also say that the Serb government has very good information about where they are, where the 2,000 buried people in Kosovo are – the remains of 2,000 people from Kosovo are.

So it is very important for us to have good signs, but not doubting signs which keep these tensions high in relation with Kosovo and, on the other hand, part of the process, I would say, a profiting process from Serbia so that it can fulfill its intentions. We are interested that we create a new level of communication between two sovereign countries. Kosovo has gone through this tragedy, which you know we can never forget those, but we are very much pledged to keep all of this in our memory as a closed chapter and start the best relations between two sovereign countries.

Under the prism of these demands by Serbia is also the international court. The – according to its tendency, it will put – bring to this court the countries that have recognized the independence of Kosovo, countries that have helped the freedom of a people. Kosovo is a sui generis. It has never been part with its own well with Serbia. It has been part of a state structure which was destroyed with the same competences de facto as the other federal units. The disintegration of ex-federation was bloody and it was the first starting in Kosovo. This bloody policy ended in Kosovo so the Kosovo people has the legitimacy to decide on its own destiny.

The third is recognition. We will work, of course, we need help of other countries and the United States as well. They are practical aspects. We need the recognition of even countries which are smaller than Kosovo or bigger than Kosovo geographically. So everybody that recognizes us is a plus for us.

MR. BUJAJSKI: Next question. Over here, a microphone.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. BUJAJSKI: Could you introduce yourself, please?

Q: Lambosh Vendonu (ph), Greek correspondent – (inaudible) – Greek daily. Mr. Thaci, how do you respond to the accusation by the metropolitan of Kosovo, Artemije, that you met with Osama bin Laden in Tirana. And what is the purpose of this meeting?

MR. BUJAJSKI: It was such a good question. Let's have it again, yeah.

Q: How do you respond to the accusation of the metropolitan of Kosovo, Artemije, that you met in Tirana with Osama bin Laden and I'm wondering what is the purpose of this meeting? Is this true, yes or not?

MR. THACI: The Kosovo people and Kosovo policy have always been oriented towards Washington, Brussels, and NATO. We have had – we have had a just struggle with the sacrifices of 2,000 citizens of Kosovo respecting all of the democratic principles. And we are very proud that Kosovo did not have the smallest hole for terrorist elements and fundamental – Islamic fundamentalist elements. It didn't have in the past. It doesn't have now. It won't have in the future as well, never.

MR. : I don't – I cannot answer to your imagination.

(Foreign language.)

MR. : I am very proud to be at the head of the struggle against the Serbs and those who want to come to our country.

Q: My name is Zalir Scherka (ph), very nice to see you here this morning. You both gave an argument and a presentation for moving forward as a country. Can you talk to us a little bit about your next steps in terms of the economy of Kosovo and how you're working with some of the countries in the region to strengthen the economy?

MR. : In fact, an obstacle was this – to the economic development to Kosovo was its status. But now that we have a democratic country, we have great perspectives ahead of us, perspective which we have pledged to manage in a successful way. I mentioned a necessary condition was the setting up of a good governance so that it has the – be supported by the people and the internationals. And we have achieved this in the last six months, but we have to work with the administration of the U.N., international community, and NATO.

We have had this kind – good cooperation before that in the last nine-year period. We have started with the infrastructure of the legal framework, which is on Western fundamentals, and it opens up perspectives and creates the optimism that will have good progress in the future. The new climate for the economic development of Kosovo is a possibility which we'll make use of. I mentioned earlier, we are building good relations with all of the original countries, but our aim is NATO and the EU. And in this direction, there is no dilemma in Kosovo. There is a good pledge and there is vision.

The success of the donors conference was a success of this orientation, of clear orientation for the economic policies as well. I pointed out that we have already started with these reforms in the legal framework. We are investing powerfully, I would say, in education and we give – we consider education as economy because investing in knowledge as we invest in the future of the economic development and the social, economic progress of the country.

At the same time, we are investing in the reforms in the energy sector. Kosovo is a part of the region which has energy crisis. It's bad. It has extraordinary possibilities so that it can

cover its needs, but, at the same time, will help the region. So we have started on serious projects that I am convinced that will have success not only in the energy sector of power stations, but also wind, solar, and other energy.

We are working also in the healthcare infrastructure, the roads, I hope so. We have the support of the internationals in these projects. They will not be supported by the consolidated budget of Kosovo, but also by the pledges of the international community as well. At the same time, an important element for the real economic development of Kosovo is the dedication of the Kosovo institutions to have zero tolerance to negative – like corruption and et cetera.

So this is our pledge and we will continue in the future as well. We pledge also – our pledge at the donors' conference – to start as soon as possible, that is, as soon as we return to Kosovo, that management of this process will be very transparent and for every cent we'll have accountability. We are regular contacts and meetings with the donors so that they themselves can see for themselves and confirm the implementation of these donations, but at the same time, we will confirm our responsibility of the implementation of these pledges of donors. And everything in Kosovo is being done in close partnership with the internationals. Kosovo has applied for membership in IMF, the World Bank, and I hope that – I believe that the response will be a positive one. We also have made – we've had an invitation, thank you.

MR. BUGAJSKI: Questions, please. Let me jump in because there's not many questions for some reason. How do you assess the progress of the EULEX mission in taking over from UNIMIC and what do you foresee in the next few months? Will UNIMIC actually hand over all of its responsibilities to the European Union?

MR. : It is a specific theme, that topic that I'll reserve for the end of my speech. Kosovo is – has entered the new process of the need to start an international cooperation with the presence. We have two presences: NATO and EULEX, which will continue with the needs – will continue the appraisals for the needs of the country and they will stay for a long time so that they will be our partners, cooperation partners at the same time.

I think that we could have – it would be better to have a more accelerated process and we have waited for the start of this acceleration soon after the proclamation of independence of Kosovo. It is very helpful. I have expressed it also in the U.N. and the letter that I sent to the general secretary, Ban Ki Moon, that the process of configuration on UNIMIC in this process – in this spirit will end very soon. Every retardation will bring dilemmas in the functionality and effectiveness of democracy and developments of Kosovo. And every retardation will have its consequences.

So we think that the preparations for what we call the easy transition period from the international mission to the other one will be easy. We will never agree that in Kosovo have two missions. And UNIMIC, for example, will remain as a mission which will take care of the Serbs and EULEX will take care of the Kosovars or the Albanians, the majority. We – for us, it is important to have only one mission which will help the Kosovo institutions, processes, and the citizens.

Of course, we have said and we are pledged to work well and we would also want to remind you that the implementation part of the ACO will be in effective function to help the Kosovo institutions to implement Ahtisaari plan, pledges, that is. And we do not have any dilemma in this. There might be practical problems that can exist in every society, but we have the determination and we will work.

MR. BUGAJSKI: Other questions, please.

Q: Can I ask in Albanian? Yvizya Brena (ph) from the World Bank. Mr. Prime Minister, you mentioned that from the donors conference in Brussels, you were given like \$2 billion. How – which is the guarantee that they will – you will manage this money correctly and which are some of the measures that you have taken in this direction?

MR. THACI: The guarantee to management, of good management, is the determination of the Kosovo institutions, of its leadership, institutions that convince the international community for the good management and the professionalism that we showed – that made the donors trust us with this project. This is testimony to the transparency of this process and I think that this is the close cooperation with all of the relevant international institutions. This will not be an isolated process; it will be open; it will be transparent and in close cooperation and partnership.

We have created joint mechanisms now with USAID, with the World Bank, and other institutions that will work on the two-year project – in the projects that are coming – two years. We are foreseeing three, four period; it was foreseeing that this project would be for three to four years, but we asked that this be a shorter period. We'll fight against the crime, organized crime, and we have showed dedication in this, and I would say patriotic determination to fight corruption and organized crime and then will not leave any opening to this, will have zero tolerance to this negative phenomenon for the society and the stability.

MR. BUGAJSKI: I think we have time for one more question, somebody else you've already asked. Suddenly, everybody wants the last – can you stay another hour? Over here.

Q: David Sands with the Washington Times. Could you assess the situation in the North and, in the long run, do you think the Kosovo Serbs – or that that part of the country can be integrated into Kosovo, the majority, and that area does not support the idea of an independent Kosovo?

MR. : We – I said it at the beginning that in Kosovo, there is a part of the Serb citizens who hesitate to accept the reality and to be part of this reality in setting up conditions for life for all of the citizens. There are reasons for why they do this and I mentioned it in my speech that, the reasons why, but there is a parallel function of this would makes it – brings tension to Kosovo. And they want to have Kosovo as a prey.

Most of the Serbs in Kosovo, two-thirds of Serbs, live within Kosovo. After the proclamation of Kosovo as an independent country, the ill omens or scenarios that foresaw the massive exodus, demonstrations, et cetera of the revolt of the citizens – all of this did not happen.

It was a dignified way of how they behaved, also of the Serbs that they like, love Kosovo as their own country. And we encourage those on this basis to continue the cooperation in the future and it is very good that part of them participate in the institutions as positions reserved for them.

We would like that in the coming election mandates every citizen of Kosovo to think very highly of their vote, the vote that they will give. We have also – they will have their reserved quota so that they will participate. There will be some ideas circulating about the cantonization of Kosovo, for the separation of Kosovo. They do not have any support. They do not have the support even among the Serbs in Kosovo because they see that their interests are validated as equal citizens to have – to move freely within Kosovo.

They have said they think, as we do, that Kosovo loses its multiethnic character because, with the idea that probably somebody can invest in the separation of Kosovo. But many problems will come up, for which it would be very difficult, very difficult to come to the bottom of it. So we have made an assessment of our realities and this normal real limited number of people, we – we have the intense – we, group of contacts, the contact group, the council, Security Council, et cetera, that together we will work in unison so that this parent of Kosovo shall not be a frozen conflict, but work so that people can return to their homes, the Albanians in the North and the Serbs in the South, so that people can have work, can have jobs, they see the perspective of development. And this is the change. I know that it cannot be done overnight, but it will be done through a process, an important process, and done through the projects of the government, that the government has in place.

MR. BUGAJSKI: Do you have a very short question? It's going to be the last one. I hope it's a very good one.

Q: Thank you very much. Yananova Sipifov (ph) from the Armenian Reporter. And I was wondering what is Kosovo's stance on the fact that there are many other entities in the world that are seeking independence or recognition of their independence, and will you be supporting them wherever that is? Thank you.

MR. : I think that I gave a response in the previous question, but I think that we evaluate this reality of the common reality of all of the Kosovo citizens. We need the stability of the neighboring countries as well. Never has – will Kosovo have any idea of aggravation or expansion in other territories, but will have – there might be individuals who could play with, let us say, that what you mentioned of the proclamation of independence, of the separation of Kosovo, the separation of part of Kosovo. But it is not supported by the – they are citizens as well – by the institutions of Kosovo and by the international community as well.

MR. BUGAJSKI: Okay, I think we're done. Thank you very much, Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister. (Applause.) Let me just throw in a last word. I think, as you've underscored, it's important for Kosovo to be successful and it's important for the U.S. to make sure that it's committed to that success over the next few years. So looking forward to seeing both of you in Pristina. Thank you very much for coming.

(END)