

## **Mr. Walker, Kosova and Ahtisaari**

**By Xhavit Shala**

Two prominent personalities<sup>1</sup> that were once closely related to developments in Kosova, the American William Walker and the European Marti Ahtisaari, once again see themselves involved in the matter with Mr. Walker following developments in the ground and Ahtisaari working on the diplomatic side.<sup>2</sup>

On January 15, 1999, William Walker, the then Head of OSCE Verification Mission in the once Serb occupied Kosova, arrived in the Recak village at the head of group of journalists and observers. On that same day Serb police and paramilitary forces had just committed a massacre against the unprotected civilian population of Kosova, killing 45 civilians among whom many women, children and elderly people.

Thanks a very courageous work by William Walker and the team he was heading, pictures and camera shootings were broadcasted worldwide raising indignation in the public. There was an international reaction similar to the ones experienced during the Srebrenica atrocities committed by the Serb forces.

In fulfillment of their mission, William Walker and the OSCE, made an extraordinary service to the Kosovars. Their alert put an end to the Serbian propaganda and its support in the west about the alleged need to keep Albanian Muslims under tight pressure. The events evolved soon when in the night of March 24, 1999, NATO launched an air bombing campaign against Yugoslav Army infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

At the peak of air strikes against Belgrade, the EU countries appointed Marti Ahtisaari, the Finish former President, as their envoy who would fly to Belgrade to meet Milosevic. He introduced Milosevic to a peace plan, a document containing 12 demands of the G8 countries, also known as Petersburg document and made him aware that he had better accept them without any condition.

Belgrade's acceptance of the plan put an end to the Serb military and police presence in

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<sup>2</sup> The article was published initially in Korrieri newspaper on 14.10.2005

<sup>3</sup> The Recak killings are considered a decisive moment in the history of conflict in Kosova. The investigations carried out by various international investigating teams concluded that the majority of victims were killed in close proximity. The Recak crimes lead to an increase in the international pressure to solve the crisis in Kosova, and subsequently to the NATO air strikes against Serbia two months later. Former Serb President Milosevic when charged with responsibility over the massacre, tried to bring forth witnesses in an effort to undermine the truth over the incident. - Ana Uzelac IWPR Project Manager in The Hague. [http://iwpr.net/?apc\\_state=henitri2005&l=sq&s=f&o=235783](http://iwpr.net/?apc_state=henitri2005&l=sq&s=f&o=235783)

Kosova. This peace plan, even though “imposed,” convinced Belgrade. By accepting the plan, Serbia could escape NATO bombings and a possible ground invasion that could even get to Belgrade. Milosevic also hoped that by bringing the Kosova issue to the diplomatic track, he could take it out of the war dynamic and still hold the hope of indefinitely preventing its separation from Serbia.

Serbia’s withdrawal was considered a successful conclusion of the west’s new military diplomacy. This plan put an end to Serbia’s genocide in Kosova. It is still however doubtful whether this plan helped Serbia and democratic development there. If the coalition forces that liberated Kuwait would have continued their push to Baghdad in 1991, Iraq would have become since long ago a democratic state and the Iraqi people, the region would have been better for it.

Many analysts on both sides of the Atlantic say that the entry of Ahtisaari into action was orchestrated by the Europeans who wanted to take control of the diplomatic effort as any further military action against Serbia could lead to a growing US influence in the Balkans, which would in turn demonstrate the failure of the EU common foreign policy.

Now six years later, we see again William Walker and Marti Ahtisaari involved in the process, the former on the ground and the latter in the diplomatic field. Walker made no effort to hide his intention to be seriously engaged in the process of resolving Kosova’s final status<sup>4</sup>. He will meet in Prishtina with Kosova political leaders and working groups, engaged in the final status talks. Ambassador Walker is very clear about his position. “The only formula for the status that I have is independence, a full, clear and unconditioned independence,”<sup>5</sup> Walker told “Voice of America” on October 9, 2005. He warned that some of the terms used as formula for Kosova status solution are vague. Together with a team of former US diplomats and politicians, he introduced in Prishtina the Alliance for the New Kosova. This group will back Kosova independence and will work for its quick and fair resolution of the status.

Following the announcement of Kai Aide on the beginning of status talks, the position in support of an Independent Kosova is being articulated with growing frequency by important international and U.S. dignitaries. “The only remaining alternative is independence and the sooner it is recognized, the better it would be. The best solution would be to set a date and Kosova declares its independence on that date,” the US Congressman Elliot Engel said a few days ago.<sup>6</sup> Engel himself is suspicious of the various Kosova status formulations that are being circulated. “If with conditional independence we mean undisputable independence, he said, then this is acceptable.” But if conditional independence is a justification used to block the independence, then I am against it.”

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<sup>4</sup> Mr. Walker is also the Chairman of the Board, American University in Kosova

<sup>5</sup> William Walker: “Kosova status settlement – a pre-condition for stability in the Balkans”- Interview given to the VOA journalist Ardita Simiçia on 09-10-2005

<sup>6</sup> - US Congressman Eliot Engel interview for VOA journalist Isabella Çoçoli- Washington, 07-10-2005

Kai Aide's green light on status negotiations,<sup>7</sup> was also accompanied by his warning that whatever the outcome of the status, it should never be a failed one. Fortunately, enough, on the eve of the status talks, the Albanian political factor is unified and committed to speaking with one voice for Kosova independence. Even Albania has now taken a clear position on the final status. According to PM Berisha, his government supports the solution of this major issue in accordance with the will of the Kosova and in coordination with international authorities.

The statements by Ambassador Walker and Congressman Engel, the Kai Aide report and statements made by Albanian politicians all indicate concern not only with regard to the outcome but also with regard to the complicated final status formulations that the Kosovars are being presented with. These formulations have created confusion and are making the preparations for the status talks difficult. The Kosovar team to take part in these negotiations must learn to navigate these waters even in the presence of this fog.

In all likelihood, Ahtisaari will be the one Kofi Anan will appoint to lead the talks on the status.<sup>8</sup> Ahtisaari understands that the current situation in the Balkans cannot be compared with the one present when he undertook his first mission. If he once saved Milosevic during his first mission by convincing him to withdraw troops from Kosova, this time he can save all of Serbia by convincing their leaders to legally separate Serbia from Kosova. In any event, Kosova and Ahtisaari will continue to be together for some time.

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<sup>7</sup> UN Special envoy in Kosova, Kai Eide, in his report submitted to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan insisted that it is now the time to open status talks process. Mr. Anan based his recommendation to the UNSC on starting the Kosova final status talks on the report of Mr. Eide.

<sup>8</sup> UN Secretary General appointed former Finnish President Martti Ahtisari, to head Kosova status talks on 2.11. 2005