

Putin the Businessman, and the Price of Kosova

By Xhavit Shala

“Putin in Russia¹ is considered more like a CEO than a country’s president.² The way he leads the country is that of businessmen and not of a person elected to put his heart to his work,” Garry Kasparov, the head of the opposition coalition "the Other Russia," told Reuters a few days ago.³

The world chess hero, the hope of the new politics of the Russian opposition sees Putin as “a dictator, whose authoritarian rule is sending Russia back to its dark past.” And the developments in Russia confirm just that. Putin’s two terms in office have been characterized by a growing power of the FSB (the successor of the KGB) over the Russian government and across the country. According to a study published in Russia, more than 1000 of Russia’s current senior politicians and bureaucrats were once part of the KGB.⁴ Today’s Russian Secret Services are operating in the same way their KGB predecessors did, by shutting the mouth of those who think differently and who dare to differ with the Russian ruling elite. The murder of the journalist, Anna Politkovskaya,⁵ the murder of the former agent Litvinenko⁶ and the mysterious poisoning of the former

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² The article was published as an editorial in the daily “Koha Jonë” 18.4.2007.
<http://www.acnss.com/html/studime/1804putini.htm>

³ Russia, Casparov warns of troubles ahead – Interview given to “Reuters” by Garry Casparov, a key actor in the opposition coalition "the Other Russia.”

⁴ The dangerous new game of the Chess master - “Lajm” daily, Prishtina, December 18, 2006.
<http://www.lajm.info/images/Edicioni%20Kosov/viti%202006/Dhjetor/Nr.682/1-23.pdf>

⁵ 18.10.2007- Officials from the Russian Prosecutor’s Office says that the main suspect in the murder of the Russian journalist Politkovskaya is a general of the Federal Secret Service. Vyacheslav Svirnov, a Russian prosecutor, said that nine other people have been called for questioning as suspects in the murder. According to sources from the investigation, charges are mainly focused on Pavel Ryaguzov of the State Secret Service and former employee of the KGB for abuse with the investigation file. Ryaguzov was arrested in August on charges related to another case. (<http://www.hermesnews.org/rubriche/stampa-redaz.asp?IDREDAZIONALE=1169>)

⁶ BBC, May 22, 2007 –prosecutors in London say that there is sufficient evidence to bring charges against the former Russian agent, Andrei Lugovoy, for the murder of the Russian dissident, Alexander Litvinenko. Mr. Litvinenko died in a hospital in London on November 23 after being exposed to a radioactive substance, Polonium 210.
(http://www.bbc.co.uk/albanian/neës/2007/05/070522_litvinenko_prosecutors.shtml)

Russian Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar are only a few clear demonstrations of this situation.

President Putin's businessman-like behavior inside the country has been reflected also in Russia's position on regional crises. During the recent international conflicts, the Russians had demonstrated a more cautious approach than was the practice in the past. For quite some time now Kremlin had avoided going openly against the European and American diplomacy. Many were under the perception that Russia's interest in the Balkans had diminished. And according to many analysts this would provide Kosova with an added advantage on its path towards independence. Many had also thought that in exchange for certain economic benefits, Russia would not make use of its veto. In recent times, however, there has been a radicalization their position, which shows that Russia is considering making a return to the strategy of tension in relations with the other states, a new cold war of sorts. This radicalization in position was particularly noticeable on the eve of the release of Ahtisaari's package.

Rather than trying to resolve conflicts, the Russians are now trying to take advantage of crises for economic benefits. Putin is trying to achieve the same results with the situation in the Balkans. During his term in office the Russian foreign policy has become in fact a business for the enrichment of Russia's new elites. They are using Kosova's case to draw in as many political and economic advantages as possible.

The 1999 conflict in Kosova demonstrated to the world that the age of Russian military power in Europe had definitively come to a close. The conflict also proved to Russia that it could not be a military superpower unless it became an economic one. Whereas the Russian forces provocatively deployed into Prishtina's international airport with great fanfare as NATO forces were just coming in, they were forced to withdraw a short while later due to Moscow's economic inability to sustain them there.

Dictators never let a failure go un-revenged. At the moment when they feel strong again they want to revisit the place of their failure but this time as winners. Hitler forced France to sign the capitulation on the same carriage where the French had once forced the Germans to sign their World War I capitulation.

It is regrettable that today's autocratic leaders try to revenge their failures the same way the dictators of old did. Putin is trying to use Kosova, the place where Russia once showed its failure, to demonstrate to the international public opinion that now that Russia has become an economic superpower no decision can be taken hereafter without them. With this goal in mind, they are now insisting on putting off the Ahtisaari package and threatening to use the veto power on the Security Council.

Russia is doing all it can to thwart the Western plan for the future of Kosova. Its goal is to divide the implementation of the Ahtisaari's plan into several pieces. They were able to transform the invitation tendered by President Sejdiu's to visit Kosova and see the progress achieved, into a fact-gathering mission on the implementation of the UNSC 1244 Resolution. It is very likely that the Russians will now insist on forcing the

Albanians to improve the conditions for the Serb minority in exchange for the promise that they will achieve their statehood later. To make the promise credible, Moscow may propose the beginning of the implementation of the Ahtisaari's technical proposals such as those pertaining to decentralization and minority protections while insisting that the implementation takes place in the context of the 1244 Resolution. The prolongation of the status-quo would give the Russians and the Serbs more time. The status-quo would lead to more security problems in the region and to more political and economic benefits for Russia. A destabilization of the region would not directly undermine Russian interests. Aside from the countries of the region, the bill would be paid by the EU countries, including the cost of dealing with a wave of refugees that may go knocking on their doors. "The fate of Kosova is intertwined with that of the EU," Joshka Fisher, the former German Foreign Minister, says.⁷

The postponement of the resolution on Kosova's status would also help Russia achieve another objective. Putting the matter on hold while keeping the Americans and the Europeans engaged there would help Russia turn attention away from the expected developments within their country. "Russia is on the threshold of political upheavals ahead of the presidential elections of March 2008. There is growing dissatisfaction among the people because of the difficult conditions and the poor standard of living," the leader of the Russian opposition, Kasparov, said.⁸

Kosova's status-quo presents Russia with economic opportunities. Further delays in the resolution of the status and a potential destabilization of the situation in Kosova would keep the U.S. and the EU tied down in the region which would allow the Iran nuclear crises to persist. Permanent tension with Iran and any other country of the so called axes of evil in the Middle East would translate into more dollars per barrel of oil. Economic analysts expect the price of oil to rise towards the 100 dollar mark. This would mean more money for Russia's State energy monopolies Gazprom, Transneft and Rosneft. To ensure the success of their profitable strategy of permanent tension and keep the oil prices high, the Russian have turned to using their Secret Services also. The press reported a few days ago, quoting sources from the Russian Secret Services, that the U.S. was considering launching an attack against the Iranian nuclear installations.

It is likely that Russia will exploit Kosova's case to advance their political and economic interest while ensuring that their relations with the U.S. will not suffer irreparable

⁷"A Kosova that is strong and stable will need a strong and united European Union. If the EU will be divided on matters that lay at the heart of its geographic space, at the heart of its interests, its credibility as a factor in foreign policy matters outside of its borders will fall dramatically. Only a united Europe can draw Russia into a harmonized policy for the Balkans. European security depends on the integration of Serbia, just as the Serb aspirations depend on the EU"- Joshka Fisher told the Serb daily "Danas" in an interview. ("Danas", April 14, 2007;

<http://www.danas.co.yu/20070414/vikend9.html#4>)

⁸ Russia, Casparov warns of troubles ahead – Interview given to "Reuters" by Garry Casparov, a key actor in the opposition coalition "the Other Russia."

damage. It is likely that the businessman Putin may conclude a deal over Kosova at the next G8 summit in the fall which could lead to a decision not to vote against the independence. The deal would be conditioned by what the Russians will request as a price and what the menu will offer.

The Russians are not the only one trying to exploit the Kosova talks to advance their interest. Serbia also is trying doing the same. The Serbs have understood that Russia is not playing for their side. They understand that Russia is actually taking advantage of the situation to advance Russia's political and economic agenda. President Tadic seems to have come to this realization, however painful it may have been. On April 12, he said "that he no longer talks to the Russian officials about the veto," because he knows it fully well "that the Russians will take care of their own interests" and that "Serbia's interests are not a priority for Russia."⁹ The Serb politicians, while still not liberated from the fever of nationalism, are failing to appreciate the advantages that the Ahtisaari package affords them. They appear unable to brake free from the Russian influence that is keeping them from advancing the real interests of the Serb state.

At a closer look, the Ahtisaari package is more of a plan for Serbia than for Kosova. It is a plan for Serbs not only because 2/3 of the plan are devoted to protecting Serb rights but also for the real benefits Serbs would get if they accepted it. The plan actually transforms Serbia into a superpower in the Balkans and prepares a much smother road for its EU and NATO accession plans. It transforms Serbia into a state that will have the keys to security in the Balkans due to the position of its minorities and the rights that they have achieved in the neighboring country.

Given the consensus and international support generated, the Ahtisaari plan as far as the Albanians are concerned has already fulfilled its mission. If the plan was not to be approved, the absence of such a package would actually undermine the interests of the Serbs minority in Kosova. Once this stage is over, Kosova would be recognized as an independent state in a chain action by individual states. Without the limitations placed by the Ahtisaari package, the Kosovars could also insist on a full recognition as an independent state. Without such a package in place, the Kosovar could also consider reviewing some of the excessive concessions made to the Serbs, concession that could threaten the national security of Kosova. However, if they decided to accept it outside the framework of a UNSC decision, they would only be making sacrifice for the sake of security and peace in the Balkans and in Europe.

The United States and the EU will do all they can to keep Russia engaged in the process of resolving the status of Kosova. But at the end of the day, even without Russia they will have to find a resolution because the fate of Kosova is intertwined with that of the EU. A

⁹ During an interview for the BBC, April 12, 2007, commenting on a question of the Serb leaning toward Moscow and the Russian veto in the UNSC, Serb President Tadic said "I do not talk with Russian officials about the veto ", adding that he knows very well that the "Russians will take care of their own interests ", and that "Serb interests are not a priority for them."

strong and stable Kosova will require a Europe that is united and strong. And only a united Europe could incorporate Russia into a harmonized policy towards the Balkans.