

## **Serbia and the Attempt to Export the Crises**

**By Xhavit Shala**

“The EU<sup>1</sup> policies toward Serbia are misguided and have only produced negative results,”<sup>2</sup> Serb Prime Minister Kostunica said in a statement a few days ago.<sup>3</sup> And a good part of the Serb political class shares this same opinion with him. Such politicians have failed to resolve the major problems that affect regular Serb citizens like poverty, corruption and organized crime. These politicians have tried to lay the blame for the failure and the crises that has gripped Serbia on external factors. They continue to deceive their people and are now trying to export their crises to Kosova.

Transferring the crises to Kosova, they believe, will help them tackle several problems with one shot. It will help them shift the attention and put the blame for the internal situation on developments there, at least all the way to the election; it would help them justify their failure to deliver on Kosova on the argument that they tried to do their best and even tried to divide the northern part of Kosova but were faced with such a high international pressure, and could do only so much; Transferring the crises there would also turn the attention away from their failure to cooperate with the Hague tribunal. Having realized that Kosova is lost, they also hope to exert as much pressure as they can on the international community to secure greater benefits in exchange for Kosova.

The fleeting success of the policies of myth that have numbed the Serb people has assured Serb politicians that there are benefits that they could draw from transferring the crises to Kosova. But the bill of transferring the crises will also be paid by the Serbs of Kosova who once again will be the ones who bear the cost of Belgrade’s official policy. The recent visit of Prime Minister Kostunica to Gazimestan on June 28 was organized as a function of this strategy.<sup>4</sup> Such a strategy of transferring the crises to Kosova presents a serious threat to the security of Kosova and of the region.

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<sup>2</sup> The article was published in the daily Shqip on July 7, 2006. the article was also carried by the [www.acnss.com](http://www.acnss.com) and the internet web page of “Lajmi Shqip

<sup>3</sup> The Serb Prime Minister Kostunica criticized the EU policy toward Serbia and took special issues with the continued conditions placed on Serbia’s relations with the EU. The EU suspended last month the SAA talks due to Serbia’s failure to arrest and extradite former Serb commander Ratko Mlladić: “VOA” 21-06-2006

<sup>4</sup> Upon invitation from Archbishop Artemije, Serb Prime Minister Kostunica visited the monastery of Gracanica. During the visit, the Serb Prime Minister said that the Kosova would remain in the future as the “Serb Jerusalem.” “And there is no better place to renew what every Serb must always know, that Kosova has always and will always be a part of Serbia. Serbia wants a solution based on its historic right over Kosova.” [www.lajmet.com](http://www.lajmet.com) 28 06 2006/V.H.

The attempt to transfer the Serb internal crises to Kosova enjoys more than just the support of Serb political sections. This operation is conducted under the patronage of the Serb Security Information Agency (BIA). The Agency is having a hard time keeping under control not only Southern Serbia with the ethnic Albanians that live there but also Vojvodina in the north. Transferring the crises to Kosova would shift attention away from both of these potential trouble spots in Serbia. The director of the Agency, Rade Bullatovic, in his report to the Council on Security of the Parliament of Serbia said that during the last six months there were concerns that “local terrorist groups” had emerged not only in Serbia but in the region also. During the last two years, he says, “no terrorist attack has taken place in Kosova and in Southern Serbia, but since January the events demonstrate that there is an effort to bring terrorism to the territory of Serbia. This is coming from groups in Kosova.”<sup>5</sup> These groups from Kosova are not BIA’s only concern. As Rade Bullatovic admitted in his remarks before the Parliamentary Commission, “in the territory of Vojvodina, extremists from the ranks of national minorities are taking advantage of the current political developments. Following developments with the determination of Kosova’s status and the dissolution of the Serbia-Montenegro union these groups are undertaking new initiatives and making separatist demands.”

While the EU, through the spokesperson of the EU Commissioner on Enlargement told the Serb Prime Minister without much diplomacy not to blame the EU for the failures of his government,<sup>6</sup> the developments that followed the statement by the US and certain Contact Group countries that the Kosova status was to be determined within this year, were very serious. The Serb actions to divide Kosova have moved beyond propaganda. According to James Lyon, the Head of International Crises Group for Serbia, the Serb government has decided to follow a policy that would partition the areas inhabited by Serbs from those that are inhabited by Albanians. The phone lines and power infrastructure in the enclaves, in northern Mitrovica, Zveçan, and Zubin Potok have been turned into the direction of Serbia. In the meantime, the administrative, educational and police structures are run from Belgrade. The Serb Government, he concludes, “has taken such measures that if it were left up to them, they would be able to achieve the division of Kosova immediately.”<sup>7</sup>

Everything seems well organized. These preparations were preceded by the decision of the four communes in the northern Kosova (Zveçan, Leposavic, Zubin Potok and

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<sup>5</sup> The report of the BIA director (Serb Intelligence Agency) Rade Bullatovic, on the performance of Agency delivered to the Security Commission of the Parliament of Serbia in June of 2006. Daily “Danas” June 20, 2006 and Radio Free Europe in Serbian. (<http://www.danas.co.yu/20060620/dogadjajdana1.html#0>)

<sup>6</sup> Kostunica’s statement was followed by an immediate reaction by the EU. Prime Minister Kostunica should not blame the EU for the failures of his government, the statement said. A spokesperson for Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, says that time has come for Serbia and its leaders to fulfill the conditions required for establishing closer ties with the Union. “VOA” 21-06-2006.

<sup>7</sup> “Barry Wood : A Crises Group analyst warns Belgrade on the plan to partition Kosova” – “VOA” 24.6.2006

Northern Mitrovica) to cut all contacts with the international community and the institutions of Kosova and declare a state of emergency.<sup>8</sup> “The Emergency Committee” declared by these communes is an effort to legalize the illegal parallel structures of security that have existed there for some time now. Their intentions are no longer secret.<sup>9</sup> Milan Ivanovic, the vice Mayor of the Commune of Zveçan, one of the leaders of the Serbs of northern Kosova, told Radio Deutche Welle on June 8 that this committee would control the security in northern Kosova. According to him, “Serbs in the north would block the roads, establish checkpoints, control vehicle movement and take into their own hands the security situation whenever they will note suspicious movements.”<sup>10</sup> This is more or less an effort to create another Republika Srbska, but this time it would take place in Kosova.

These communes have recruited the services of Yugoslav army veterans and former Police officers that served under the rule of Milosevic. Their salaries are paid for by the Kostunica government. These reports have been confirmed by domestic and international media. The experts in the field of the Albanian Center for National Security Studies in the Kosova branch have also confirmed the same.

The authorities in Kosova and the international bodies have reacted to this situation. The UNMIK Chief, Soren Jessen Petersen, accused Serbia of inciting ethnic tension in an effort to hinder the independence of Kosova and called on the Security Council to take immediate measures to determine the status of Kosova.<sup>11</sup> KFOR deployed troops to a new base in the north of Kosova, whereas the American Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, said in Brussels on June 9 “following the restructuring, the KFOR forces will be prepared for any eventuality.”<sup>12</sup> UNMIK deployed 800 international police officers to northern Kosova, a force that included 500 special police forces. The Kosova Police Service also increased the number of forces stationed there.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The leadership of the four communes in northern Kosova has decided to cut off all links with the international community and the Kosova institutions. (Beta, June 6, 2006)

<sup>9</sup> The Government of Kosova reacted upon hearing of the arbitrary decision of the Communal Council of Zubin Potok that declared “a state of emergency.” The government invited the authorities to engage in a direct dialogue with the government to deal with the situation. The Prime Minister’s Spokesperson, Ulpiana Lama, said that the state of emergency could not be declared by the Council of Commune, as it is a power that is reserved to the central authorities. (Kosova Live June 8, 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Radio Deutche Welle, June 8, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Heinlein : the head of UNMIK accuses Serbia of inciting ethnic tension in Kosova - “VOA” June 20, 2006

<sup>12</sup>(Beta) - Brussels, June 9, 2006

<sup>13</sup> According to Kosova Police deputy Commissar, Sheremet Ahmeti, the Kosova Police Service has raised its alert level and is keeping the situation under control in Kosova and its northern part in particular. Due to the incidents that have taken place in recent days and with the purpose of ensuring law and order in all of Kosova, starting from today the Police will intensify the application of the operation “Firm Security,” already underway. www.lajmet.com. 07 06 2006.

In an effort to neutralize Serb propaganda about the alleged lack of security for the Serbs of northern Kosova, the Commander of NATO's southern wing, Admiral Henry Ulrich, also visited the area alongside Kosova government and UNMIK officials, on June 30. In the meeting held in Leposavic with the mayors of the northern communes, the American Admiral let them know once again "that the North Atlantic Alliance remains committed to maintaining order in the whole territory of Kosova." "The mayors of Serb majority populated communes should not rush into conclusion about the recent incidents in this part of Kosova and should go back to cooperating with the institutions of the government of Kosova."

The imitate actions undertaken by the international factor, by NATO<sup>14</sup> in particular and by UNMIK and the Kosova government, and the reactions of public opinion in Kosova and beyond were able to expose quickly the attempt undertaken by Serbia to export the crises to northern Kosova. The danger will be fully eliminated, however, only when the parallel security structures will be dismantled and the Serbs of Kosova will be provided with the security they need. The threat will still be present. Serb history proves that Serbs are often prone to illogical actions.

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<sup>14</sup> NATO will send additional security forces to Kosova that will demonstrate that its forces are read to respond to any eventual crises in the Balkans, the KFOR Pio Sabeta said. The instructions are clear, he said, and are based on the NATO commitment and determination to keep the peace and the stability of the Balkans. [www.lajmet.com](http://www.lajmet.com)- 08 06 2006/V.H.