

Tectonic Movements in Balkan Geopolitics

By Xhavit Shala

Recent¹ developments regarding the final resolution of Kosova's [Kosovo] status;² the Contact Group questioning the principles it had previously set itself; a practically official trend towards Kosova's partitioning, attempts to dismiss the Ahtisaari [UN envoy to Kosovo] plan; the airing of many options for the future of the Balkans; and granting legitimacy to the idea that multiethnic states have failed in the Balkans, lead one to expect powerful tectonic movements in Balkan geopolitics.

Under these circumstances, attempts to change Kosova's borders are provoking the Albanians and creating a situation that would call for a change of borders throughout the Balkans. At the same time, they are creating the conditions and potential for the Albanians to organize and channel their national question towards its final solution, that is, the unification of all Albanian-inhabited lands and the formation of an Albanian national state.

"We have to sacrifice the Albanian people for the sake of peace in Europe," British Prime Minister Edward Grey said at the 1913 London Ambassadors' Conference, which decided that half of the Albanian-inhabited territories were to remain outside the borders of the newly formed Albanian state."³ Now, some 100 years on, the Albanians will not accept being sacrificed for the sake of the "sacred unity of the EU," that is, to allow some EU members to flirt with Russia, or for the sake of the Russian gas flowing to Germany and other EU states.

Availing themselves of the restraint and submission of the Kosova Albanians and their trust in Western support for their cause, some European circles intend either to leave Kosova in a state of frozen conflict or to partition it. These circles have forgotten that, when the Albanians saw that their peaceful movement was getting them nowhere, they took up arms to defend their rights. "It was the Kosova Liberation Army [UCK in Albanian, KLA in English] resorting to armed struggle in opposition to the desires of Ibrahim Rugova [late Kosovo Albanian leader] and the international community that in

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² The article was published in the daily "Koha jonë", on August 22, 2007; and was subsequently picked up by the BBC Monitoring European: Commentary Says Choice Between UN Kosovo Plan or Pan-Albanian State.2007.08.26. <http://www.acnss.com/html/studime/2208levizja.htm>

³ An interpellation with Sir Edward Gray was held in August 12, 1913, in the London's House of Communes. Gray said, "I am convinced that when all shall become known, this decision will be rightly criticized by everyone who will look at the matter from the perspective of his country and people. We must keep in mind that during the talks on the borders of Albania the main goal was to keep the conflict from spreading among the Great Powers. If such an agreement on Albania was achieved while keeping the harmony between the Great Powers, we can say that this is a complete success for the vital interest of peace in Europe." (http://floart.blogspot.com/2005_11_01_archive.html)

the end led to the intervention of the West and the ousting of Serbian forces from Kosova," says William Montgomery, former US ambassador to Belgrade.

These circles are short-sighted if they expect that they will be able to turn into an EU official policy a situation in which "no sooner will the Kosova Albanians understand that the international community is determined to prevent any moves towards independence, than they will accept its propositions". In the course of the centuries, European policy has caused much bloodshed in the Balkans, and especially among the Albanians, by failing to deal with difficult problems linked to deep-seated emotions.

The former European great powers, which today continue to be the main actors on the European political scene, are - together with other powers - responsible for the current state of the Albanian nation. How can one expect that those same countries that brought about the partitioning of the Albanian-inhabited territories will solve the problems that the Albanians are facing at present? Now those states, which are partly guilty for the current division of the Albanian nation, are being put to the test - to see whether they will do something to atone for their past injustice. The test is whether they will assume their historic responsibility by endorsing and implementing the Ahtisaari plan. Perhaps President Bush wanted to remind the Europeans of this responsibility when he visited Tirana on 10 June, the anniversary of the Albanian League of Prizren.

For their part, the Russians are working on a long-term plan to increase the distrust of the Balkan peoples towards the United States and the West in general. They are trying to weaken the pro-US sentiments of the Albanians in the region. They know that they can achieve this by dragging out the Kosova issue for as long as possible. The Russians know that, just as they received US President Bush, the Albanians had in former times received Tito, Khrushchev, and Chu En-lai. Because the Albanians severed relations with Yugoslavia, Russia, or China almost immediately after each of those visits, the Russians hope that the Albanians will do the same thing with the United States. They hope that, in this manner, the Balkans will again fall under Russian influence. However, they fail to see that, while friendship and expressions of respect for the Yugoslavs, Russians, or Chinese were superficial, something imposed by communist ideology, the Albanians' friendship with and respect for the United States or the West stems from their Western tradition and civilization, which cannot easily be expunged from their minds.

The time has come for the Albanians to react as one nation and insist on the implementation of the Ahtisaari plan for which they made many concessions affecting their rights. Now, however, the Albanians should make no further concessions for the Kosova question to be solved. They should reassess the situation, and if they see that attempts are being made to deny Kosova its independence or to partition it, then - wherever they happen to be, in Kosova, Macedonia, the Presheve [Presevo] Valley [in southern Serbia], or Montenegro - the Albanians should speak with one voice and call loudly for these regions to join Albania and for the formation of an Albanian national state in the Balkans.

In this case, skilful policies are called for and, provided the Albanians have such leaders who will work for a just solution to their problems, it can be hoped that things will take a turn for the better.

Everything will depend on how the question of Kosova's final status is dealt with. It will depend on the international community whether the tectonic movements in Balkan geopolitics end up with the formation of a new state - an independent Kosova - or with a change of borders that will affect several Balkan states, that is, create a new geopolitical map of the Balkans.

Even circles that are none too well-disposed towards the Albanians expect - to a certain extent - a reunification of the Albanian nation. The day after Bush's visit to Albania, the Greek daily Ethnos wrote that "almost half the Albanians live in the countries neighbouring Albania: Kosova, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Whether we like it or not, these people want to be unified in an Albanian state that will gather all Albanians within its borders, when the conditions are ripe."⁴

The conditions are now ripe. Steven Mayor, a professor at the US National Defence University, has said: "There is no logical reason for the United States or other countries to oppose partitioning or changing borders. Developments of this kind have been happening constantly in both European and American history over the last 300 or 400 years, and there is no reason for them not to be taken into consideration now. The great powers, including the United States, must accept the existence of alternatives which initially they opposed and which now must be re-examined."⁵

What the Albanians may undertake to unify their territories into one state does not fall foul of international law. Why should the Albanians not do so at a time when Lavrov [Russian foreign minister], the adversary of Kosova's independence, is seeking scientific evidence 4,200 metres below the Arctic Ocean to enable Russia to claim millions of square kilometres in the Arctic, even though international law says nothing about the ownership of this region.⁶ While the Russians are looking for scientific evidence under the Arctic Ocean, claiming that that the undersea area of this continent - the Lomonosov Ridge that links Siberia to the Arctic - belongs to them, no scientific evidence is needed for the Albanian territories and their inhabitants in Kosova, western Macedonia, southern Serbia, or Plave and Gucia. Nobody questions their Albanian character.

⁴ According to reports from journalist Aleksander Marku in Athens, the Greek paper Ethnos of June 11, 2007 called on Greek diplomacy to embrace a new approach considering the fact that the Balkans were now Americanized and that should force Greece to change its foreign policy" Gazeta Shqiptare, June 12, 2007.

⁵ Steven Mayer: "Delays in the status of Kosova should be followed by serious negotiations." Interview conducted by VOA journalist Zamira Edwards, Washington, D.C. June 2, 2007.

⁶ Russia has recently claimed an area of 460 km² in the Arctic in spite of international law that prevents a country from doing that. The Russians claim that there is an underground link between the Siberia and the bottom of the Arctic. The UN has rejected Russia's application for sovereignty over this area. Fedorov said that the goal of this expedition is to collect further scientific evidence of Russia's geographical links with the area. If proven, then Russia could establish its right according to international law to make use of the resources there. ("Albania", August 3, 2007; <http://www.gazeta-albania.net/news.php?id=16312>)

To conclude, the time has come for the situation to be re-examined and, if attempts are made to deny Kosova its independence, or to partition it, the Albanians of Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, the Presheve Valley, and Montenegro must speak with one voice and call loudly for the formation of an Albanian national state. Only then will the continental shelf of Balkan geopolitics find peace and tranquillity.