

## **The Marathon of Independence**

**By Xhavit Shala**

Recent developments clearly show that Kosova<sup>1</sup> is successfully approaching the most interesting part of the long marathon towards independence.<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in the moves undertaken by all parties, who directly or indirectly are interested on Kosova. Positive developments supporting Kosova independence are found also in political and intellectual circles in Kosova. Fortunately, enough, even the Albanian political factors is also moving. European diplomacy is making huge efforts to end successfully this Kosova marathon. During the second tour in office of President Bush, his administration has also woken up to Kosova and has become very active on the issue. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, has gathered around the team that participated in the finalization of Dayton agreement. It appears that the Secretary will entrust the same team with ensuring a successful “Dayton for Kosova.”

Political changes in Albania brought a repositioning of Albanian politics towards Kosova, as Serb circles feared. “As a function of promoting the development, stability and the prosperity of the region, we believe that time has come to draw the conclusion that an independent Kosova is the best solution for the people of Kosova and the region as a whole. An independent Kosova would generate more stability and security for the region and beyond,”<sup>3</sup> Albanian President, Alfred Moisiu, said during his last speech at the UNGA

This statement came as no surprise to the Serb delegation given the fact that our President and Parliament have consistently supported the independence and the right to self-determination of the Kosova people. Serbs seems that they had received guarantees from previous statements of the Albanian government over Kosova, starting from 1997 statement that “Belgrade is Kosova’s capital<sup>4</sup>” and its cause will be resolved within

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<sup>2</sup> The article was initially published in “Korrieri” newspaper on 27.09.2005 and in [www.acnss.com](http://www.acnss.com)

<sup>3</sup> On September 14, 2005, the Albanian delegation lead by President Topi, Prime Minister Berisha and Foreign Affairs Minister Mustafaj were in New York to attend the UN General Assembly meeting. “Kosova shall be independent,” President Moisiu said, following the UN Summit. “Tema” Newspaper, September 16, 2005, pg. 3

<sup>4</sup> Former President Milosevic in an interview for Russian based newspaper “Pravda” in 2001 said: “In October 1997, the leaders of Southeastern European got together and reached an understanding with each other. I suggested that we did something good for our region. I told them let us open our borders. And the meeting went really well.” Milosevic then talks about his meeting with former Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano. “I had an excellent tête-à-tête meeting with Fatos Nano, Prime Minister of Albania. We discussed about opening up our borders and he said that Kosova was an internal problem of Serbia. The message from that meeting was that the problems of Southeastern Europe would be resolved through negotiations.” The meeting between Milosevic and Nano caused a stir in the media. A well-known Greek journalist, N.Marakis, provided further details about the meeting. He told “To Vima” that Nano and Milosevic had a very warm meeting where they are reported to have consumed more than two bottles of

“Balkan’s democratization” framework” and the more recent one on “building democratic institutions in Kosova, through step by step process of achieving the standards and then resolving the status.”

The statement in New York by Albania’s new chief of diplomacy, Besnik Mustafaj, in the presence of Vuk Drashkovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia – Montenegro Union, that “the future of Kosova cannot be discussed between Tirana and Belgrade and that both Tirana and Belgrade could not be the determinant factors for Kosova future,”<sup>5</sup> indicates that Tirana officials have left behind a senseless policy of passive neutrality where the fate of its co-nationals in Kosova is concerned. While it remains unclear, what the term actually means, Mustafaj’s insistence on “conditional independence,” was met with harsh Serbs reactions. The Serb representative Miomir Udovick said that he “was taken aback by Albania which seems to have changed its policy and now is backing the independence of Kosova.” “This does not help the collaboration between Tirana and Belgrade and the promotion of regional stability.”

The statements delivered in New York by the foreign policy chiefs of Albania and Serbia are visibly softer than the ones delivered when in the region. The temperature in Kosova’s furnace is fast increasing. The international community is worried that the furnace does not have the capacity to contain the fire herein. Their fears were increased especially after they were informed about the state of health of President Rugova.

By insisting on the establishment of an independent Kosova, instead of joining Kosova with Albania, Kosova politicians and intellectuals are convinced that they are thus making the biggest concession possible for the sake of stability in the Balkans. The international community should appreciate this position. In a statement published on June 29, 2005 the Kosova Writers Association said “that the compromise to stay away from our mother [Albania] is as tragic as accepting the step mother in our mother’s stead.” Therefore, full independence for Kosova could, to a certain extent, provide a compensation for the historical injustice can be, in a way, compensation for historical injustices which is now being offered under the guise of more than autonomy, less than independence.”<sup>6</sup>

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whisky. A short while later, during an event in Krans Montana, the Socialist leader declared that the capital of Kosova is Belgrade.  
[http://www.albeu.com/lajme/lajmi.php?subaction=showfull&id=1189519543&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=4](http://www.albeu.com/lajme/lajmi.php?subaction=showfull&id=1189519543&archive=&start_from=&ucat=4))

<sup>5</sup>Interview of Mr. Besnik Mustafaj for the journalist Beqir Sinaj in New York published in "Bota Sot" and "Metropol" newspapers. The Minister says that he made clear to Vuk Drashkovic that, “Kosova’s future needs to be discussed by the factors which are in Kosova, that is the International Community – Brussels, Washington and the legal representative institutions in Kosova. I reiterated again that neither Belgrade nor Tirana could decide on Kosova’s future. This is the best solution I think.”  
<http://listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0509d&L=albanews&P=79>

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Kosova Writers League, published on 29 June 2005, in several media in Kosova.

During a meeting with 22 EU ambassadors accredited to Belgrade, Kosova speaker Nexhat Daci reiterated again Kosova's unchanged position that it will never negotiate over its independence with anyone. The path to complete independence, he said, needs to be discussed with the international community and Serbia as a neighboring country.

"A new wave of violence will erupt in Kosova if the UNSC and the Contact Group impose a decision over Kosova that offers less than independence. The same applies on Serbia's position. The Serb formula would let hell loose in Kosova, in Serbia and the other countries in the region" former Kosovar political prisoner, Adem Demaçi, told Novi Sad paper "Gragjanski list."

Former US diplomat Richard Holbrook expresses the same concerns when speaking to the Swiss newspaper "NZZam Sonntag." "If the international community shuns its responsibility over Kosova, then blood will spill in the streets of Prishtina."<sup>7</sup>

It appears that reactions from Kosova and other members of the international community were generated in response to the continued threats that Foreign Affairs Minister of Serbia and Montenegro Vuk Drashkovic has made on every public platform. During the EU Conference on Iraq, Drashkovic said, "An independent Kosova is possible only by force. Anything that is done by force against the will of Serbia will destabilize Serbia, Kosova, Albania, Western Macedonia, Bosnia, Bosnian Republika Srpska and will undoubtedly cause huge unrest, which is of no use to us, the region and Europe." Demonstrating that he is a slave to Serb myths and it appreciates more his faithfulness to them rather than to his country's EU integration, Drashkovic provocatively visited Kosova exactly on the 616<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kosova Battle.

While Drashkovic threatens that nothing will be done if it goes against the will of Serbia's people, Serb Prime Minister Kostunica and Sanda Raskoviç-Iviç, head of Serbia's Kosova Coordination Center have said again and again that Serbia's will can grant "only more than autonomy and less than independence." According to their explanation what this means is that Kosova shall have it authority while Serbia will continue to exercise state and territorial sovereignty over Kosova. The Albanians in Kosova will have executive, legislative and judicial power. Kosova will be a demilitarized area and Serbia will keep control of borders, customs, and its fiscal and monetary policy. Kosova and Serbia will share a Ministry of Defense, Foreign Affairs and a seat in UN."<sup>8</sup>

Even in the Serb camp there are voices, that although are under the pressure of a manipulated domestic public opinion, are trying to find solutions and get the Serbs ready to accept something which is now an irreversible reality. Serbia has no ambitions to dominate Albanians, but finds it hard to give up its historic territory, in which about 100,000 Serbs still live, Serb President Tadic told the "Associated Press." By declaring

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpts from the interview of former US Diplomat, Richard Holbrook on Kosova for the Swiss newspaper "NZZam Sonntag"

<sup>8</sup> The Serb proposal "more than autonomy and less than independence" was introduced during the negotiations under the guise of different models such as Hong Kong Model and others.

that losing Kosova cannot be compensated by a swift integration into the EU, Tadic is trying to play ball on two fields simultaneously. On the one side he wants to preserve his credentials as a moderator, on the other hand playing the nationalist is becoming harder now that even Montenegro is getting ready for independence.

The EU chancelleries have already prepared their “emergency” strategy, “Brussels will be ready to recognize the unilateral declaration of Kosova’s independence. They do not want to fall prey to Balkan intrigues or risk failure as in the case of the EU Constitution.

According to “the Strategy Paper” being promoted on behalf of German diplomacy by the Bertelsmann foundation, “The EU shall constitute an independent Kosova, if the Albanians of Kosova and the Serbs are not able to solve the conflict themselves.”

The same document also says that in case independence cannot go through the UNSC, then “Brussels should be ready to unilaterally recognize the new state of Kosova.” The German advice relies also upon the good results achieved during the unilateral recognition of Croatia, when they declared independence from Yugoslavia.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously, for the Europeans this is more than just “Strategy-Paper.” An article published in the Polish newspaper “Zhecpopolita” which quotes sources from the European Union says that, “the European Union has many problems of its own and wishes to solve Kosova issue, in order to give independence to Kosova.”

The Americans also appear determined not to fall into the trap of indefinite negotiations and the escape strategies. The Republican US Congressman, Dana Rohrabacher, member of the House of Representatives from California, who recently paid a visit in Albania and Kosova, in an interview for the Voice of America on 23.9.2005, said: “Negotiations could last forever as long as we are footing the bill. The solution is not negotiations and more negotiations. The solution will be to give the chance to Kosova people to take a decision for their final status and not to a foreign group of bureaucrats talking to each other.”<sup>10</sup>

While sending a warning to that segment of the international community that by encouraging endless negotiations are interested in helping Serbia, Dana Rohrabacher also warns the Albanians and Serbs in Kosova. “With regards to the Serbs of Kosova, their rights must be respected. But in a democratic society the minorities, in Kosova’s case the Serbs make up less than 10%, cannot take a decision for the entire country. Serbs have the right to express their considerations, they cannot be discriminated but they cannot take decision regarding the direction the country should take. They can live as a minority in Kosova and everyone will insist on their rights being respected but they must accept

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<sup>9</sup> “The Strategy-Paper” was introduced during a meeting of high-level politicians of the EU and Balkan countries in June 3-4, 2005 organized in Zagreb by the German Foundation Bertelsmann. Among the proposals introduced by the well-known German foundation was the initiative that would give the EU leadership over the Kosova status talks and the creation of an independent Kosova with limited sovereignty under the EU supervision (Lajmi newspaper).

<sup>10</sup> Dana Rohrabacher-Interview given to VOA on 23.9.2005

the will of the majority, Congressman Rohrabacher says. "If they want to live only among Serbs then they can go to Serbia. Serbs can not expect to dictate their policies to more than 90% of the population, with the expectation of the fact that their rights must be respected fully." Clearly stated and requiring no further interpretation.

Congressman Dana Rohrabacher demonstrates a very good understanding of the situation in Kosova where all Albanian and international political actors are committed to a multiethnic Kosova that respects everyone's rights but one can not make the Serbs return to Kosova by force. This position is confirmed by the Deputy Director for Returnees and Communities at PSSP Office in Kosova, Chilean Klesspit who says, "If we see the figures, then the results tell us that the number of those who are fleeing is bigger then the number of who are returning, and the underling problem is the economy and unemployment."

However, guaranteeing the freedom of movement for citizens, ensuring the rule of law and democratic progress and the fight against organized crime should be a priority for all Albanians in Kosova. Then the decision on whether to stay or leave Kosova is a decision that is for the Serbs to take.

Serbia is working hard in the diplomatic field to ensure, in addition to Russia's, the veto of China in UN Security Council against Kosova independence. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro Union, Vuk Drashkovic, according Tanjug press release on 14.9.2005, said that he had received assurances that "Russia will insist both as a member of UNSC and the Contact Group, to ensure that the international standards agreed on Kosova will be implemented."<sup>11</sup> Drashkovic knows very well that some of the standards mentioned are not met even by certain EU Member states. That is why they hope to get Russian and Chinese support to stop Kosova from becoming independent.

The neutrality of UNSC members who are showing resistance regarding Kosova issue, especially Russia and China, will be a challenge for those countries supporting Kosova independence. This is challenge also for the Albanian diplomacy, which directly or through third parties, should become more active in this direction.

Different political research centers, closed to western policymakers, in their efforts to ensure that Belgrade will not cause more problems in the region, have prepared studies for concrete compensations for Serbia, in order for Belgrade to sign and accept Kosova's independence. These policies are being implemented from these countries and are being transmitted through media to Serbian and international public.

The western chancelleries will also place firm demands on the Albanians in Kosova to ensure the application of certain mechanisms that would condition the independence of Kosova with the fulfillment of certain criteria that would guarantee the rule of law and democracy. These mechanisms would enable the international community to monitor the developments and growth of Kosova institutions closely as well as ensure the implementation of guarantees for the Serb and other minorities. These mechanisms will

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<sup>11</sup>TANJUG report dated on 14.9.2005

in effect temporarily put limitations on Kosova's sovereignty while making sure that nothing is left in Serbia's hand.

In reality, even in the event of full independence, the international community has all mechanisms it needs to control all standards such as rule of law and respect for ethnic minorities. Kosovar politicians must work hard to prevent any attempt for the partition or the cantonization of Kosova and they should waste no time on quarreling over that shall lift the torch of independence.