

Kosovo and Serbia after the French *Non*

The European constitution was not the only victim when French and Dutch voters summarily rejected it this summer, triggering the worst crisis in half a century of EU history. The European Union's whole consensus method went into shock as bitter public recriminations renationalized EU members' psychology. With this, the world's most promising example of regime change is endangered at the very moment when that European transformation is finally reaching even the vexed Balkans. Over the past decade, the lure of membership in the EU zone of peace and prosperity has been so powerful that it has compelled painful democratic, legal, judicial, and market reforms in state after state as post-Communist governments have striven to prove their worthiness to join "Europe." The most glaring exception to this democratic ferment was Serbia until the spring of 2005. Belgrade then abruptly abandoned its conspicuous indifference to the European Union and followed the path of central Europeans, dashing to qualify for future accession by softening its hard line on Kosovo's "final status" and sending a dozen Serb war-crimes indictees, whom it had previously harbored, to international trial.

Following the French referendum, though, the reward for Belgrade's incipient change of heart is a French-led revolt against any more EU enlargement to take in new members, implicitly including Serbia and Kosovo. This new fortress mentality would void the main incentive for unstable Yugoslav successor states to overcome the powerful domestic mafia, elite, and peasant resistance to reform and democratization. A return to the terrible Balkan

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wars of the 1990s, perhaps by escalation of the sporadic Serb-Albanian fights in Kosovo's Mitrovica, is by no means inevitable. Yet, such recidivism is a greater risk now than it was before the French and Dutch votes.

Perhaps the best single test of that risk for the Balkans, and for the West as a whole, is the threat the EU retreat poses to resolving the present limbo of the international protectorate of Kosovo by nudging it toward a stable "final status." Serbs and Kosovar Albanians, adamant for six years that, respectively, Kosovo must forever remain a province of Serbia and that Kosova (the Albanian spelling)² must have instant independence, have finally begun to moderate their demands a bit, precisely because of their yearning to meet the preconditions for joining the EU. Yet, any peaceful settlement without resumption of the ethnic wars that in the 1990s produced the worst massacre in Europe in half a century would seem to depend on the prospect of eventual EU membership for Serbia and Kosovo. If that prospect is now waning, so is EU pressure to carry out the transformations in mindset that alone might overcome old habits of stasis and conflict, bring the Balkans at long last into the European mainstream, and even set a positive example for global democratization that is now America's prime foreign policy goal.

Incipient Progress

To date, the greatest accomplishment in the Western Balkans, to use the neologism covering the former Yugoslavia and Albania, is the ending of mass bloodshed. The 1995 massacre of almost 8000 unarmed men and boys at the Bosnian town of Srebrenica shamed the West into intervening. That intervention succeeded. Convictions for genocide and war crimes there have been handed down by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). One million refugees have repossessed their homes in Bosnia-Herzegovina and no longer fear marauding neighbors at midnight. Officials of the Republika Srpska, the Serb entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina, finally admitted last year that Serbs did commit crimes in Srebrenica, and the Serbian president participated in the tenth anniversary commemoration of the massacre on July 11. The Macedonian Slav and Albanian communities, while hardly integrating, have by and large confined their fights to polemics since the West-brokered Ohrid Agreement of 2001 set minimum levels of ethnic minority Albanian representation in the Macedonian government. In Albania proper, although political parties of hostile clan and patronage networks show little sign of evolving into more institutional and less personalized parties, no extensive armed clashes have occurred since the anarchy of the late 1990s. And in Kosovo, the anti-Serb pogroms that erupted in the spring of 2004 were not repeated this year, in part because of better

The Western Balkans



Map courtesy of globalsecurity.org

NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) preemption, in part because Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj became the first ethnic Albanian indictee to appear before the ICTY voluntarily, and in part because Kosovar Albanian leaders understood the political costs of more unrest and managed to keep their radicals in check.

Yet, attempts by the Balkan states to go beyond a mere absence of war and achieve the longed-for bliss of becoming “normal,” as certified by ultimate membership in the EU, are spotty. Their task is a daunting one, of course; membership requirements demand that they leap in one generation from nineteenth-century stasis, hierarchy, and chauvinism to democracy, free markets, and social openness. The longer they postpone these transformations, however, the more they will fall behind what they still call simply, as a kind of remote utopia, “Europe.” “This is our first chance in 500 years to determine our own fate! Whatever we’re doing to meet EU requirements is what we should be doing for ourselves anyway,” explained one of the thirty-somethings who now populate Balkan ministries of European integration, recalling Ottoman rule, twentieth-century wars, and half a century of communism.³

The world's most spectacular example of regime change is endangered.

Clearly, not everyone in the Balkans sees things this way, and one of the main barriers to such a mindset has been the unsettled Serbia-Kosovo dispute. Belgrade politics has been poisoned for years by the refusal of Serbs to understand that they forfeited their ancestral heartland of Kosovo through their brutality against the majority Albanians there in the 1990s and by their assumption that Belgrade can stand pat and nothing will change because Kosovo is still officially a province of Serbia under the interim UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Conversely,

in Pristina many Albanians remember fondly their rescue from Serb tormenters by NATO and Madeleine Albright in 1999 and also think they can stand pat without meeting UN-prescribed human rights and other standards because the United States will step in at the end of the day and give them independence regardless. And until this year, the Serb-Kosovar deadlock was frozen in place

by the cautious wait-and-see stance of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which for five years just kept hoping that some solution would turn up.

What did turn up in March 2004, unfortunately, far from facilitating resolution, exacerbated the confrontation. The sudden eruption of violence by 50,000 Albanian rioters in Kosovo left 20 dead and more than 800 injured; 32 Serb churches and monasteries desecrated; and some 4,500 Serbs, Roma, and other members of minorities expelled from their homes.⁴ Shortly thereafter, Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide submitted an analysis of the events to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that faulted the unpreparedness and inaction of UNMIK and, by implication, the steering Contact Group of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia. The internationals duly shifted from their previous demand that the Kosovar Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) meet all the political and institutional UN standards before talks on the future status of Kosovo could even start—"standards before status"—and before the UN administration could transfer more competences to the PISG. Under the more relaxed slogan of "standards *and* status," they also commissioned a progress report on Kosovo for the late summer of 2005 that will, it is hoped, let real negotiations start later this year to clarify Kosovo's status on the scale from full independence to return to Serbian rule.

With this jolt, the politics of Kosovo's final status began to shift. The West concluded that status talks must begin sooner rather than later. Russia, whose zeal to champion the far-off Serb Slavs has waned sufficiently for it to have withdrawn its troops from Kosovo (and Bosnia) two years ago, now seems ready to trade its potential Security Council veto on Kosovo for

concrete payoffs elsewhere in the world. Serbian prime minister Vojislav Kostunica, who has ranged from adamant to passive on Kosovo (and on extradition of Serbs to The Hague), has been rethinking his position and suddenly had a dozen Serb indictees arrested and sent to the ICTY last spring. (Ostensibly, they turned themselves in voluntarily. Threats to cut off their military pensions if they did not do so, however, along with promises that the ICTY would not remand them to Bosnian or Croatian courts, as well as other incentives, seem to have greatly encouraged such voluntarism.) Also, contrary to expectations, Haradinaj, a former Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) commander who became prime minister after elections in October 2004, brought a younger, pragmatic, and energetic leadership to Kosovo in his three months in office before he resigned and went to The Hague to face his war-crimes indictment in March 2005.

The endgame has not yet started, but there is now movement. This year, the West set clear parameters for any settlement with its “Four Nos”: no return of Kosovo to Serbian rule; no immediate full sovereignty for Kosovo; no partition of it; and no mergers, for example, of Kosovo and Albania.⁵ By default, the status that the West would approve is some version of conditional independence, with international overseers holding significant powers in defense, justice, policing, and the protection of minority Serbs for years to come.

The West’s determination to move the process forward is thus now joining with domestic Serbian politics, according to western European diplomats, to nudge the “moderate” nationalist, or “nationalist legalist,” Kostunica toward a less rigid approach. And some realists among the Kosovars, not including the intransigent semiotician-president, Ibrahim Rugova, or some of the politicians with close ties to the mafias that profit from the current institutional vacuum, are also slowly beginning to divine that two-thirds of a loaf of sovereignty might be better than none. These shifts matter.

The Serb Perspective

To start with the Serbs, the hindrance to a Kosovo solution has long since ceased to be former president Slobodan Milosevic, who has been defending himself aggressively for four years at his trial in The Hague but has lost influence in Belgrade. Political blockage in the past two years has come instead from the complex Serb psychology, as reflected in the combination of the long inert Kostunica and the all-too-active ultranationalist Radical Party of the one-time warlord and present defendant at the ICTY, Vojislav Seselj. For two centuries, the Serbs have seen themselves as the most dynamic of the Balkan peoples and the natural leaders in the region. They outnumber other Slavs in the environs. In medieval times, they ruled an empire, and in

the less remote past, they were the first Slavs to break out of the decaying Ottoman empire, winning autonomy in 1830 and independence in 1878. Their fierce nationalism, combined with the pan-Slav sentiments of the smaller Croats in the Wilsonian aftermath of World War I, led to the birth of the first Yugoslavia, which was dominated by the Serbs' King Aleksandar.

In the second Yugoslavia after World War II, the deracinated Croat-Slovene Josip Broz Tito may have balanced off the Serbs against the other constituent nationalities. After Marshal Tito died and his third-way communism faded as political legitimation, however, Milosevic rediscovered the magic of Serbdom. In 1987 at Blackbird Field in Kosovo, the site of the epic

This new fortress mentality removes the main incentive for reform and democratization.

fourteenth-century defeat of the Serbs by the Ottoman Turks, Milosevic thundered to aggrieved Serbs, "No one will ever beat this people again!"⁶ It was the perfect appeal to the deep sense of Serb victimization that has long coexisted with the Serb superiority complex. At issue was the belated autonomy that Tito had granted the majority Kosovar Albanians in the 1970s. Albanians had quickly supplanted Serbs in the top Communist party and secret police posts; become prominent

in the professional elite of teachers, managers, and professors at the new Pristina University; and begun to harass the local Serbs to make them leave the province. The roughly 13 percent Serb minority (according to the 1981 census) resented the loss of its previous positions of command in the province and hailed Milosevic as the savior who would reconstitute the rightful Serb dominance.

Milosevic increasingly played the nationalist card, expelling Albanian directors of hospitals, schools, state enterprises, and the more lucrative shops in Kosovar cities. Albanian society went underground, running forbidden Albanian-language schools and holding clandestine votes in which Rugova, preaching nonviolence, was overwhelmingly elected shadow president. The new, unemployed Albanian intelligentsia that had poured out of Pristina University talked febrile politics day and night in street cafes and would by the end of the 1990s form the leadership core of the KLA, with its revolutionary alternative to passive resistance. Kosovo remained a thorn in the side of Milosevic, not only because of Albanian unrest but also because, as Yugoslavia broke up, the restored Serb colonial rule in this mythic cradle of Serb nationalism precluded any peaceful resolution of problems among nationalities elsewhere. Any readjustment of the republic's borders by local referendum that might have joined Serb villages in Croatia and Bosnia to

the Serb motherland and probably won international assent⁷ would also have severed Blackbird Field from Serbia and delivered it to the Albanian majority in the province. After some vacillation, Milosevic opted to fulfill by force what quickly became his Greater Serbia project. He freed the notorious Arkan⁸ and other criminals from prison to lead paramilitaries in the murders and ethnic cleansing that would climax in the Serb atrocity in Srebrenica in July 1995.

This legacy was inherited by the one presidential candidate on whom the democratic anti-Milosevic bloc could agree in 2000: Kostunica, a constitutional law professor by training and no natural politician. He won the vote and unseated Milosevic after his ally Zoran Djindjic led street protests and cut a deal with elements of the powerful security-criminal nexus to enforce the election results without bloodshed. As prime minister and the more powerful player, the reformist Djindjic then gambled on arresting Milosevic and extraditing him to the ICTY; to do so over Kostunica's opposition, he marginalized the president's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) in a bitter split. When Djindjic subsequently judged that the time was ripe to move against his erstwhile cronies and set up a Special Crimes Court to handle prosecutions of organized crime cases in 2003, he was assassinated, allegedly by the Zemun gang.

In his stead, Kostunica was elected prime minister, forming a minority government only with the tolerance of Milosevic's Socialists and with Djindjic's Democratic Party (DS) in the opposition. Unlike Djindjic, Kostunica seemed unmoved, until recently, by the vision of eventual EU membership. He thus appeared to be immune to the whole dynamic that galvanized reform and modernization in the central European states that joined the EU last year and that is supposed to do the same in the more raucous Balkans. In neighboring Croatia, by contrast, to win its present coveted EU candidate status alongside Bulgaria and Romania, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader dramatically shunted ultranationalists aside in his Croatian Democratic Community party, if not yet in the security services and the courts. In paralyzed post-Djindjic Serbia, however, this kind of leverage for political and economic reform did not seem to work until recently.

This year, Kostunica began realizing that his passivity has allowed his DSS to be infiltrated and radicalized by ultranationalists, even as voter support for the DSS as a whole is being eroded by Seselj's Radicals. The Radicals placed second in the presidential runoff vote in the summer of 2004, winning 45 percent to the 53 percent for the pro-European, pro-reform Boris Tadic from Djindjic's DS. And the latest opinion polls about parliamentary elections give the Radicals a 32 percent lead to 23 percent for the second-ranking DS. This squeeze, coupled with threats by the small G-

17 Plus technocratic party of economists to pull out of his coalition and force disastrous new elections if Kostunica did not unblock international aid for Serbia by sending some Serb indictees to The Hague, finally persuaded the prime minister to begin delivering those charged.

The West now hopes that, despite past feuds, Kostunica will conclude that the DSS's only real partners are the other democratic parties, especially the DS. For two years, the most public difference between the two leaders has been precisely the issue of extraditing ICTY indictees to The Hague. Tadic, as well as the leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement party, Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic, repeatedly urged the Belgrade government to pay the price of dispatching to the international court the most wanted Serb war-crimes suspects, including the fugitive top Bosnian Serb political and military leaders at the time of the Srebrenica bloodbath, Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic. By convincing or coercing those dozen lower-ranking Serb indictees to surrender this year, Kostunica finally won EU approval in April to proceed with the long-delayed "feasibility study" for a Stabilization and Association Agreement for Serbia and Montenegro, the first step toward eventual EU accession. EU enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn publicly linked approval of the study to forthcoming status talks on Kosovo.⁹ EU high representative for common foreign and security policy Javier Solana did the same in an interview in April 2005.¹⁰ Kostunica, in his first display of interest in EU rewards, declared immediately, "We regard the EU as our common home."¹¹ Western Europeans are now stressing to Serbian officials that their country has the sophistication and the experienced personnel to proceed rapidly toward membership if they have the political will to meet the democratic and market requirements, and prior to the French referendum, a senior EU official hinted in private talks with Belgrade that he would now press to put Serbia on the same membership fast track as Croatia if the top indictees are delivered to the court in the near term.

Indications that the Serbian shift is more far-reaching than seemed possible even a few months ago can be found in the changing attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church toward indictees, whom clerics used to praise as heroes, and in the surfacing of a video of the executions of unarmed Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) prisoners from Srebrenica in 1995 by uniformed Serbian paramilitary police. The new approach by the Orthodox Church is being spearheaded by young Bishop Grigorije of Trebinje in eastern Herzegovina, a man who conducts friendly dialogue with other religions, regularly condemns attacks on mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and shocked Serbs this past spring when he called publicly for all indictees to go to The Hague. Thereafter, other members of the Orthodox clergy in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina made similar statements. A fierce internal dispute about

church reforms continues, with opposition to Grigorije's more open approach coming from traditionalists such as Bishop Artemije in Kosovo, who fear the church will lose its soul and become "too Protestant," and from the "red clergy" that was installed in the Communist decades.¹² The outcome of this battle will have a strong influence on public opinion about Serb pride, European identity, and criminal accountability because the church is still the most trusted of any institution in Serbia.

Even more sensational for the average Serb was the surfacing this past June of a previously secret two-hour video of the 1995 torture and execution of six Bosniaks from Srebrenica, four of them under the age of 18, by uniformed Serbian Interior Ministry paramilitary police called "Scorpions." Twenty copies of the video, which was filmed by the Scorpions themselves, had been used in Serbian military training glorifying such operations. As word about the video seeped out, an order was given to destroy all the copies, but one survived and was ferreted out by a Serbian human rights activist, who passed it on to The Hague in May.¹³ "Most Serbs 'til now either believed nothing happened [at Srebrenica] or that the people who did the atrocities were Bosnian Serbs, wild guys from the mountains, or even French special forces—but this is forcing Serbs as a whole to come to grips with what happened," commented Obrad Kesic, senior partner of the Washington-based TSM Global Consultants.¹⁴ Parts of the video were aired in Serbia, not only by the independent television station B92 but also by state television; both Kostunica and Tadic reacted publicly to the broadcasts. Tadic declared that this was evidence that terrible deeds had been committed in the name of Serbs and that the whole nation must confront this reality. Within days, Serbian authorities arrested eight of the Scorpions shown in the video. The Serbian Orthodox synod condemned "the cold-blooded killing of unarmed, defenseless civilians." And although Radical vice president Tomislav Nikolic sued B92 and the human rights activist who exposed the video, others in his party drafted legislation calling for everyone who had committed war crimes to be held accountable and go voluntarily to The Hague.

This ferment in Serbia about the Srebrenica massacre does not necessarily guarantee readiness to make the needed concessions on the more complex status of Kosovo, of course. The sheer defeats of Milosevic in his three and one-half wars for Serbian aggrandizement in the 1990s (in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and the sham war in Slovenia) and the subsequent misery and influx of Serb refugees to Serbia proper may have checked the worst na-

After March 2004 riots, the politics of Kosovo's final status had begun to shift.

tionalist virus. A small, Western-oriented elite in Belgrade may also now argue explicitly that Serbs must transform their imperial mindset just as the Germans did after 1945. Yet, as one member of Belgrade's pro-Western core puts it, such humility born of shame was far easier for Germans who completely lost their World War than for Serbs who only partially lost their wars. As with those Germans who in the 1940s blamed all atrocities on Adolf Hitler alone to exonerate themselves, the temptation is strong, even among Serbs who do not defiantly wear Mladic T-shirts, to blame all Serb brutality on Milosevic and not on Serb voters' acquiescence or even pride in lethal chauvinism as long as it was victorious. And just as the postwar Germans in the end had to confess and repent of their will not to know about the barbarity committed in their name, so too can only the Serbs effect their own metamorphosis. Yet, as the Radicals' popularity shows, the searing Germanic Protestant honesty in admitting broader culpability is rare among Serbs. Their widespread victimization complex is a hindrance. So is the 1990s exodus of liberal Serb intellectuals, middle-class professionals, and students, along with the rise of criminals and anti-urban peasants to riches and power in the decade of embargoes and smuggler barons. In the Balkan vortex that perpetuated the 1990s butchery, Serb brutality is still widely excused by Serbs as no more than a response in kind to Croatian, Bosniak, and Kosovar brutality.

In this interior realm, lectures from Western outsiders on the need for a change of heart and constant demands for reform avail little. They tend instead to cause the Serbs to pull together, defend their own, and portray even those Serbs who conquered 70 percent of Bosnia by mortars, concentration camps, and systematic rape as victims who were only trying to prevent Croatia and Bosnia from seceding and to protect the right of Serbs there to join a Greater Serbia by dismembering Bosnia. Nonetheless, since last spring, Belgrade's official position, echoing broad hints about the coalescing Western prescriptions, has been that Kosovo might well attain a status of "more than autonomy, but less than independence." More politicians are also suggesting, not for attribution, that they would like to get rid of the Kosovar albatross that keeps them from claiming a European identity, if only voters would not punish them for such heresy.

The Kosovar Albanian Perspective

The Kosovar psychology is less convolute but possibly even more intractable, given the late arrival of nineteenth-century nationalist certitude among the Albanians, the late creation of an Albanian state in 1912, and the lingering on of a half-admirable, half-sinister clan solidarity, both politically and criminally. Moreover, unlike all categories of Bosnians, the Kosovar Albanians won

their war too quickly, thanks to NATO intervention, before they had been sufficiently sickened by the slaughter to abhor resort to violence.

In the late 1990s, Milosevic turned Serb paramilitaries and soldiers loose in Kosovo to terrorize Albanian villagers and city dwellers into leaving the province.¹⁵ By early 1999, after the Serbs had already ethnically cleansed 300,000 Albanians (and Arkan had been given a Kosovar constituency to represent in the Serbian parliament), the West reacted militarily. As U.S. planes targeted Kosovo and Serbia for 11 weeks, Serb forces in Kosovo reacted asymmetrically, killing 12,000 civilians and expelling a total of 1.4 million people, or some 60 percent of the Albanian population, from their homes in Kosovo (with 860,000 registered as refugees abroad, primarily in Albania and Macedonia, and an estimated 580,000 displaced persons in Kosovo itself).

The widespread victimization complex among Serbs is still a hindrance.

The amateur KLA, financed by taxes on Albanians working abroad and swelled with macho recruits from the worldwide diaspora, trained by fighting. It was the only anti-Serb army on the ground, because the NATO allies, fearing retribution from domestic voters, refused to wage this war except from the skies. Hastily armed with equipment from the Americans they idolized, the KLA troops did manage to flush out some Serb forces into the crosshairs of U.S. missiles, and eventually Milosevic sued for peace. Kosovo's governance was turned over to UNMIK, which was slow in organizing its unprecedented task. In the institutional vacuum, Albanian nationalist mafias, like their counterparts in Serbia, murdered and coerced their own countrymen as they liquidated informers and factional rivals, expropriated choice properties, and extracted protection money from restaurateurs and retailers below the radar of KFOR peacemakers. The first suspects the internationals would dare to extradite to The Hague or try before international judges in Kosovo would be Albanians who had killed other Albanians, not Serbs.

Amid such insecurity, the returning refugees used their remittances from family members who had earlier been sent to work in western Europe by clan elders to build private homes, not to invest in commerce. The easy money of the internationals who poured in gave a sense of false prosperity to Pristina landlords, importers of Italian tile, and pimps, but unemployment ran and continues to run at 50 percent in general and at 70 percent among the half of the population under age 25. A Kosovo Police Service was set up and, whenever its international leadership was savvy enough to protect its Albanian (and proportional Serb) policemen from mafia and clan pressure,

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began to restore order, at least in nonpolitical cases. A Kosovo Protection Corps was also founded to absorb a core of old KLA guerrillas. This the Kosovars regarded as the nucleus of their future army; this, the internationals stoutly maintained, was a service to render disaster relief. Provisional district and central government administrations were established to exercise the less important competences that UNMIK did not re-

serve for itself. KLA veterans organizations maintained their networks and mobilized them quickly once initial violence against Serbs broke out in Mitrovica in March 2004. In that rampage, some rioters attacked UNMIK vehicles and buildings for the first time, while KFOR and UN police shot and killed several local Kosovar Albanian ringleaders for the first time. Popular adulation of the international saviors subsided.

In the wake of the violence, the internationals quickly concluded that they must diminish volatility by accelerating resolution of Kosovo's status. Militants among the Kosovars first concluded triumphantly that they had proved they could push UNMIK around, then were surprised that Washington as well as Brussels condemned the violence. "I think this was a very good lesson for Thaci and Rugova," commented one European diplomat dryly about Hashim Thaci, the leader of the largest party to grow out of the KLA networks, and Kosovar president Rugova.¹⁶

In the regular parliamentary election half a year later, the vote seemed initially to do no more than reconfirm stagnation. The list system that UNMIK had unfortunately approved perpetuated the iron grip of leaders on restive younger members of parliament in what were still only proto-parties. Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) slipped some from the 2001 vote but retained a plurality of 45 percent. Former KLA spokesman Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) kept second place with 29 percent, and Haradinaj's small Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) again came in third with 8 percent. The new moderate, pro-Western Ora party trailed at 6 percent. Moreover, the election seemed to exacerbate ethnic relations and end efforts to reach any Albanian-Serb modus vivendi. The 95,000 Serbs who remain in North Mitrovica on the Serbia-Kosovo border and in scattered enclaves throughout Kosovo after the victorious Albanians harassed half of the Serb population into leaving over the previous six years tend to be ultranationalists in any case. And in this vote, even most of those local Serbs who had previously run for the reserved minority seats in the Kosovo assembly boycotted the election and opted instead for what Serbia insisted

must be Belgrade's exclusive "parallel structures" of modest pensions, clinics, and schools for Kosovo's Serbs.

After the election, the aloof Rugova again chose to stay on as president rather than mix into the hurly-burly of politics as prime minister. His LDK secured a parliamentary majority by forming a coalition with the AAK's Haradinaj and offering him the more active prime minister post. The choice was a surprise, both because it was widely expected that Haradinaj would shortly be indicted at the ICTY and because his own brother had earlier been convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for the 1999 murders of leaders of the armed wing of Rugova's party (in a trial in which key witnesses tended to meet premature death). Yet, Haradinaj, his international admirers said, was something new on the political scene.¹⁷ After the war, he had taught himself English, attended day-long EU seminars that no other politician bothered with, and compensated for his educational deficits by studying law at Pristina University. He was the one party leader who was trying to modernize his organization away from an autocratic, top-down patronage nexus by means of significant grass-roots participation. As prime minister, he grasped the importance of decentralization, implemented it enthusiastically, and took unprecedented local "ownership" of this and other policies, as one EU diplomat put it.

Then, when Haradinaj was indeed summoned to The Hague, he went voluntarily, averring his innocence. He made his decision after talking with several high-level Western officials, who advised him that he had a good chance of winning pretrial release and returning to Kosovo as a hero. Within weeks, Haradinaj, on furlough from his Dutch jail, paid a first tragic return visit to bury a second brother, who had been suddenly gunned down in what outsiders assumed was a revenge clan killing. In his funeral oration, he counseled calm.

Final-Status Prospects

So far, neither Haradinaj nor any other Pristina politician has budged from a demand for instant, full independence for Kosovo. Nor have Serbian politicians moved beyond the deliberate ambiguity of "more than autonomy, less than independence" (but still only as a province of Serbia). Yet, diplomacy is nothing if not the judo of turning weakness into strength. International efforts now clearly aim to channel the vulnerabilities of all the actors in the final-status negotiations away from paralysis toward a win-win modicum for these erstwhile losers. Some forward momentum could let the Western governments assure their taxpayers that they will not have to bankroll an expensive protectorate in Kosovo indefinitely. It could minimize Kostunica's

political slippage in Serbia and offer hope that the dynamic Serbs might still catch up after their lost decade and a half as a pariah and stubborn nonplayer in the EU game, if Belgrade also pays the other price of extraditing Mladic and Karadzic to The Hague.

The hardest place to sell the Western idea of some kind of conditional sovereignty for Kosovo will probably not be Belgrade, whose politicians sense that they might be able to use Kosovar decentralization to negotiate de facto parti-

The West's long and costly commitment to the Balkans could finally be paying off...

tion of North Mitrovica (and possibly even dual Serbian citizenship for Kosovo Serbs). The more skeptical capital will be Pristina, where politicians still dream of unfettered sovereignty and in some cases even of a Greater Kosovo that might one day encompass northern Macedonia, southern Serbia, and perhaps Albania proper. Rugova still insists there is nothing to negotiate, that Kosovo already is independent and needs

only to act on its independence. And the rougher Kosovar Albanians, having already proved their ability to pressure the internationals through violence, may not realize that any new pogroms against Kosovo Serbs could risk souring the internationals on Kosovar independence altogether. Yet, even a conditional sovereignty that offered Kosovo a future in Europe and the legal settlement of today's competing land claims could help nudge what is one of Europe's poorest regions beyond sterile reconstruction toward more promising economic development.

This is clearly a minimalist variant of the dynamic in which eventual EU accession can prod would-be candidates into carrying out painful but essential reforms; institution building; and, in the case of Kosovo, elementary state-building. Even in this form, though, a promise is implicit in the huge success of the eight ex-Communist central European states that joined the EU in 2004. In these new member states, gross domestic product growth of a projected 4.5 percent this year is already double that of sluggish western Europe. The new member states' exports, led by foodstuffs, are up 20 percent, while peasant incomes have risen 50 percent despite EU subsidy levels for the newcomers at only a quarter of Brussels's largesse to French farmers. Inward investment in Poland jumped from \$4 billion in 2003 to \$7 billion in 2004 to an estimated \$10 billion this year.¹⁸ All this the wistful Balkan onlookers know very well. Although many despair of the region's perpetual backwater status in Europe and their own continuing struggle to get their economies back to prewar 1990 levels, others draw some vicarious hope from the central European example, if only the EU will not now shut the door on them.

The most explicit articulation of a potentially brighter future both for Kosovo and Serbia can be found in the report of the blue-ribbon International Commission on the Balkans issued on the day Belgrade received the EU's green light for a feasibility study, shortly before the French constitutional referendum. It envisages an initial "independence without full sovereignty" for Kosovo, followed by "guided sovereignty" and the ultimate "shared sovereignty" to which every EU member agrees.¹⁹ The vocabulary conspicuously avoids the red flag of calling such independence "limited" or "conditional" and emphasizes the voluntary "pooling" of sovereignty to which all western European EU members assent in joining this unique hybrid between a confederation and a federation. In explaining the concept to wary Kosovar Albanians, European diplomats stress the fading importance of borders and ethnic divisions in western Europe and note the special limits on sovereignty that even the regional powerhouse of West Germany accepted in the four decades before 1990. No practitioner in the delicate diplomacy required even to get a Western consensus on this minimal course in the past half-year would dare be as blunt as the International Commission on the Balkans about the goals. They are, however, implicit in the Four Nos. They could be approached in the Kosovo status negotiations that are expected to open later this year, if necessary, by initial "proximity talks" in which Western envoys shuttle back and forth between Serbs and Kosovars who might refuse to talk directly with each other.

...Any happy ending still depends on letting the Western Balkans join the EU.

Thus far, one can detect movement by the regional players only from shifts in nuance. Yet, that nuance is crucial. Kostunica, whose opposition to Kosovo Serb participation in last fall's election in the province and conditioning of Belgrade's "parallel structure" subsidies on nonparticipation led to the overwhelming Serb boycott of that vote, has now grudgingly approved reentry by Kosovo Serbs into joint political working groups in Kosovo, if not into parliament.²⁰ Some Kosovo Serb politicians such as Oliver Ivanovic, who metamorphosed to play a constructive role in the old Kosovo parliament, are indeed drifting back to the working groups. The one Serb member of the PISG cabinet, Returns Minister Slavisa Petkovic, feels free to complain that Kostunica's hard-line policies have hindered the return of Serb refugees to Kosovo and has now founded the first Kosovo Serb political party to define its interests as different from Belgrade's. This at least begins a process of acceptance by some Kosovo Serbs that their political future lies in Kosovo rather than Serbia.²¹

More generally, enough time may now have passed for old passions to begin to cool. The myth of Blackbird Field has lost some of its luster. Growing Serb disenchantment with bankrolling the much poorer Montenegro in the provisional union of Serbia and Montenegro has also weakened Serb concern that a qualified sovereignty for Kosovo could encourage Montenegro separatists.

A promise is implicit in the success of the central European states that joined the EU in 2004.

On the Albanian side, Minister of Local Government Lutfi Haziri—one of the younger politicians in Rugova's LDK, a dynamic ex-chairman of the Association of Mayors, and an ex-mayor of Gnjilane with a reputation for having attended to the needs of Serb as well as Albanian constituents—has been energetic in implementing decentralization. This is intended, in Pristina's view, to let Kosovo Serbs eventually govern their own

localities and to wean them away from their fixation on Belgrade. Veteran conciliator Veton Surroi and his few fellow Ora party members of Parliament, while not having won enough seats to give them real political leverage, are nonetheless bringing their voices of pragmatism to policy councils; the bombing of Ora headquarters last spring suggests that the party is making enough of an impact to worry hard-liners. Moreover, as so often in the past, Surroi's old newspaper, *Koha Ditore*, its competitor *Zera*, and the lower-brow *Express* continue to give readers calm and thoughtful civic coverage that is exemplary in the Balkans.

Ten years after the Srebrenica massacre, then, the West's long and costly commitment to the Balkans²² could finally be paying off in the evolving Serb and Kosovar psychology in the region's most dangerous remaining hot-bed. Any happy ending, however, still depends crucially on fulfillment of the EU's promise to let the Western Balkans, at the end of the day, join the club. If that promise is now rescinded as Europeans become self-absorbed in the wake of the French referendum, the continent's remarkable democratic transformation may yet exclude the Balkans in Europe's own backyard.

If so, the lesson will not be lost on Turkey. Or Ukraine. Or the Middle East.

Notes

1. This article is based on interviews over the past two years in Pristina, Belgrade, Berlin, Brussels, and Washington with Ramush Haradinaj, Lutfi Haziri, Ylber Hysa, Oliver Ivanovic, Obrad Kesic, Vojislav Kostunica, Stevan Niksic, Dusan Reljic, Bajram Rexhepi, Ibrahim Rugova, Ljiljana Smajlovic, Veton Surroi, Hashim Thaci,

- Aleksandar Tijanic, and other Kosovar Albanian and Serb politicians; as well as EU high representative for common foreign and security policy Javier Solana, European and U.S. diplomats, and European Commission staff in Brussels on April 12, 2005.
2. For the sake of simplicity, the internationally recognized name of "Kosovo" is used hereafter, without prejudice as to any particular future status.
 3. Unnamed European official from the Bulgarian Directorate of European Integration and Relations with IFIs, interview with author, December 2001.
 4. International Crisis Group, "Collapse in Kosovo," *Europe Report*, no. 155 (April 22, 2004). After this report was issued, the twentieth person died of injuries.
 5. Unnamed German, U.S., and European Commission officials, interviews with author, Berlin, Washington, and Brussels, March, April, May, and June 2005. See Dimitrij Rupel, "Completing Kosovo," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2005; "Herbst sollen Gespräche...", Deutsche Welle Radio, March 12, 2005, <http://www.dw-world.de/>; R. Nicholas Burns, statement before the House Committee on International Relations, May 18, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/p/2005/46471.htm>; R. Nicholas Burns, "Ten Years After Dayton: Balkan Stability and the Kosovo Question" (remarks, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, May 19, 2005), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1422&fuseaction=topics.event_summary&event_id=122495.
 6. Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 1.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
 8. The universally used gang nickname of Zelko Raznjatovic.
 9. RFE/RL Newsline, April 18, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/>.
 10. Javier Solana, interview with author, Brussels, April 12, 2005. The text of the interview appeared as "The EU—More Like a Molecule Than an Atom," *Transatlantic IP* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 4–9.
 11. RFE/RL Newsline, April 13, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/>.
 12. Unnamed Serb source, interview with author, Berlin, June 4, 2005. I was unable to find written sources in English or German for this specific statement, but a Deutsche Welle report on a meeting in New York between UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and an official Serbian Orthodox delegation under Grigorije's leadership on March 29, 2005, supports the tenor of this account. See <http://www.kirchen-in-osteuropa.de/archiv/05033103.htm#16>.
 13. "Founder of 'Scorpions' Free in Belgrade," Blic Online, June 6, 2005, <http://www.blic.co.yu/danas/broj/E-Index.htm#2>; "Srebrenica wird in Belgrad zum Thema" [Srebrenica becomes an issue in Belgrade], *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 4, 2005, <http://www.nzz.ch/2005/06/04/al/articleCVEME.html>; "Srebrenica-Video für Ausbildungszwecke" [Srebrenica video for training purposes], *Der Standard* (Austria), June 4, 2005, <http://derstandard.at/?url=?id=2067845>.
 14. Obrad Kesic, interview with author, June 2005 (senior partner of the Washington-based TSM Global Consultants).
 15. Sell, *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, p. 267.
 16. Unnamed European diplomat, interview with author, June 2005.
 17. See UNMIK head Soren Jessen-Petersen's and KFOR-Kommandeur Yves de Kermabon's laudations as Haradinaj resigned. "Der ehemalige Kosovo-Premier" [The former Kosovo premier...], Deutsche Welle Radio, March 10, 2005, <http://www.dw-world.de/>.
 18. See Daniel McLaughlin, "Accession States Defy Pessimists," *Irish Times*, May 2, 2005.

19. International Commission on the Balkans, "The Balkans in Europe's Future," Sofia, April 2005, p. 18, <http://www.balkan-commission.org/activities/Report.pdf>.
20. RFE/RL Newline, April 13, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/newline/>.
21. RFE/RL Newline, April 14, 2005, and June 27, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/newline/>.
22. The *Economist* calculates that "the rest of the world" has put "25 times as much money and 50 times as many troops [per capita] into Kosovo as it has put into post-conflict Afghanistan." "Meet the Neighbours" *Economist*, June 25, 2005, p. 9 (survey).