

Kosovo: Hope or Despair for the Future?

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The future status of Kosovo remains as one of the few issues in Europe where making the wrong decision would result in pain. Kosovo presents a clear and significant danger to the people and stability in south central Europe.

The riots in March 2004 indicate how serious the problem is. Thousands of Albanians rioted even though a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) peacekeeping force of over 18,000 and another 3,500 United Nations (UN) policemen are in place. Even with such a presence, the forces were not able to stop the rioting that resulted in nineteen deaths, almost 1,000

wounded and around 4,000 people displaced. In addition to this human suffering, a large number of Serb Orthodox churches and homes were destroyed.

History was in the background of this event. There is a deep alienation between the now majority community of Albanians and the minority Serb community. The factors in the equation of alienation include significant religious and cultural differences.

The rioting, which included the destruction of historic Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries, raises the serious question of religious freedom. Europe and the transatlantic community can be proud of its record of protecting the rights of minority groups to remain faithful to their religion and culture.



Source: www.time.com/time/daily/special/kosovo/kosovomap.html

The official name of this Serbian province is Kosovo and Metohija. This area is the heart of Serbian culture. It is the home of around 1,400 Serbian medieval churches and monasteries. Many of these shrines are masterpieces of European and Byzantine architecture as well as fresco painting.

A Profile of Kosovo	
Population	Estimated range of 1.7 million to 1.9 million.
Area	Kosovo is about 4,200 square miles, with an additional 2,000 square miles of adjacent Metohija; slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island.
Location	Balkans, southwest of the Serb Republic.
Government	Under United Nations mandate since 1999; NATO in charge. Serbia claims Kosovo as a province. Talks on future status slated for 2005.

Kosovo was the heart of the Serbian Kingdom. In this period—17th to 19th centuries—the population was overwhelmingly Serbian. The population table below indicates the changes since then.

Total Population and Population by Ethnic Origin According to Population Censuses

Population Census Year	Total Population	Of Which in Percent			
		Albanian	Serbian	Others	Total
1948	729,000	68	24	8	100
1953	808,000	65	23	12	100
1961	964,000	67	24	9	100
1971	1,244,000	74	18	8	100
1981	1,584,000	77	13	10	100
1991	1,956,000	82	10	8	100

Source: Population Censuses 1948-1991. The quality of the 1991 census is questionable.

Changes began in the 1940s when a dramatic demographic expansion of Albanians started. Also troubling was the Italian occupation, which governed Albania (which was an ally of Germany and Italy in World War II). In World War II, Serbia was an ally of the allied powers as it was in World War I. Many Serbs were either expelled or left Kosovo in this period. Many referred to this area of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia in World War II as “greater Albania.”

In 1948, the population was almost 200,000 Serb and Montenegrins and around 500,000 Albanians. In the early 1970s, the Albanian population increased to over 900,000. This again was caused by a high birth rate and Albanians coming into the province. The Serb-Montenegrin population was around 260,000.

Kosovo, which has been administered by NATO since 1999 by virtue of a UN decree, is still officially part of Serbia. In 2005, there should be the start of talks to

determine the status of Kosovo. Many of the Albanian leaders in Kosovo are campaigning for independence. Albanian extremists threaten violence if independence is not granted.

Following the war, the Serb percentage of the population fell to ten percent. Around 200,000 Serbs plus a small number of minorities fled or were expelled. Will these displaced Serbs be able to return? Would they want to under present conditions? The bitterness between the Albanian and Serb communities is great. The pressure to grant independence to Kosovo at this time is ill advised. There have been mistakes by both. It will take time to work out a solution that is just and fair for both communities.

The granting of independence to Kosovo in the present circumstances would endanger the rights of the Serb minority. What would happen to their religious freedom when there is such a deep alienation towards them that 33 of their churches and monasteries were destroyed in 48 hours of rioting?

The international community must assure that this does not happen. The only honorable solution in my opinion is for the United Nations to establish a protectorate. The rights of all people would be guaranteed. During this period, the problems in Kosovo could hopefully be ameliorated. Progress could thus be made toward reconciliation between the two communities. A responsible governing body would be determined by the United Nations. The Albanian and Serb communities would live separately as for the most part they are now doing.

Other Examples

There are examples in the world of when two communities lived in the same area and where there was deep alienation between them. When I speak of deep alienation, I mean an intense dislike—hatred might be another word.

Reconciliation between deeply alienated communities will not end in a few years: nor can it be imposed by outside forces. Reconciliation will occur when there has been a healing between the two communities. It must come from the heart.

The Serb-Albanian conflict in Kosovo is one such alienation. It is deeply rooted and has been aggravated by recent events.

Burundi and Rwanda

A situation where there is a deep alienation between two communities living in the same area is Burundi and Rwanda.¹ I was US Ambassador to Burundi from 1969-1972. I was there for the beginning of the blood bath between the Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority in 1972. Over 100,000 people were killed. Knowing that this animosity was rooted in 500 years of socioeconomic differences, I urged that the US government advocate a plan of separation.

¹ Thomas Patrick Melady, *Burundi: The Tragic Years, An Eyewitness Account*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1974).

My recommendations were not accepted and instead the belief that the two communities would learn how to “live together” was adopted. Since then the situation has become more serious. Ethnic clashes have continued for these three decades. Thousands of Burundians have been killed and as one Burundian sadly told me, there is “no hope” for the future.

The situation in Rwanda is another example of where, despite an alienation of centuries, the international community believed that Tutsis and Hutus should live together. Around 800,000 Tutsis were killed in 1994. This was the worst genocide since Hitler’s genocide against the Jews.

Separation of the two communities could have prevented these barbaric events. Eventually the hatred would decrease and reconciliation would take place.

Separation Strategy in Malaysia and Cyprus

There are two examples where separation was employed as a strategy to avoid violence in countries where two antagonistic communities lived. In these two countries, the inter-community alienation has decreased. Reconciliation is more likely to emerge in the future.

Malaysia²

Violence occurred when two antagonistic groups were forced to live together in Malaysia. The violence has stopped not because of any renunciation of past fears and hatreds but rather because of a practical solution—separation.

In 1963, the new country of Malaysia was formed from the federation of the former British Crown Colonies of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabrah. Just two short years later Singapore left the federation because of communal violence and race riots.

The underlying factors in the separation were the divergent political and economic interests of the two chief Malaysian groups—the Chinese and the Malays. These were clearly acerbated by racial mistrust. In 1965, bitterness between Chinese and Malays spilled over into communal violence and rioting. The leaders of the predominant Chinese community in Singapore and the predominantly Malay community in Malay obviously felt that the fears and hatreds were too deep to make feasible any attempt to work things out, despite the obvious economic advantages to be gained, and went their own “independent” ways. The bloodshed came to an end.

Various theoreticians had hoped that the economic advantages of the federation would have motivated the Chinese and Malay communities to overcome the hates and fears of the past. But they did not, and the communal riots of 1965 were fraught with racial mistrust. Here, an intermediary solution was adopted. The Chinese and Malays have given up for the time being their goal of learning to live together and have established separate

² *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

nation states. While this solution implicitly accepts the reality of their deep communal mistrusts, it at least greatly reduces the possibility of continuing communal strife. One day, reconciliation will take place between the Malay and Chinese communities. In the meantime, there is peace.

*Cyprus*³

The Island Republic of Cyprus, which can trace its civilization back to two thousand years before Christ, has been a place of perpetual fighting between the Greek majority of about 80 percent and the Turkish minority of about 20 percent. The local Greek and Turkish leaders could not stop the fighting and killings between the two communities. Finally, in 1964, a United Nations peacekeeping force was stationed in Cyprus. While there have been several outbreaks of communal strife since then, the peacekeeping force of the United Nations, coupled with other regulations concerning separate communities, is generally credited with saving the Cyprus situation from deteriorating into a bloodbath. One day, there will be a significant reconciliation between the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus, so that they can live together in one multicultural community.

Religious Freedom

While the international community acknowledged the March events in Kosovo and especially the suffering of the Serb minority people, little attention was given to the question of religious tolerance and freedom of religion and the fundamental reasons for the tensions.

Thirty Serbian churches and two monasteries were damaged or destroyed. The historic structures of the Serbian Orthodox community energized the long feeling of hatred by the Albanians toward the Serb Orthodox. Most “on the scene” observers say that riots were more spontaneous than organized. Spontaneous actions normally mean that they come “from the heart” and are deeply rooted.

The implications are very disturbing. The alienation of the Albanian community toward the Serb community remains deep in their culture. The history of Serb-Albanian relations has been characterized by extreme dislikes on both sides. Neither side can claim to be innocent of ethnic bias.

Very Difficult Realities

Today, in Kosovo the international community faces the challenge that 90 percent of the present population is Albanian. They are overwhelmingly Albanian—non-Christian in culture. The other ten percent are Serbians who are overwhelmingly Orthodox. Some 4,100 Serbs fled Kosovo after the March events.

The unique place of Kosovo and Metohija in the culture of the Serb Orthodox community cannot be overlooked. The concern of the worldwide Christian community was

³ Ibid., p. 76.

reflected by Pope John Paul II, head of the Roman Catholic Church, on September 9, 2004, when, lamenting the violence of March 2004 in Kosovo, declared that all destroyed church buildings and houses belonging to Serbs in Kosovo should be rebuilt.

A key factor in the difficult challenge is that hate and disdain exists on both sides. In my opinion, there will not be a significant change in this situation for several decades.

Kosovo's final status must be carefully studied. The problems are clear for all to witness. The recent attacks on the religious heritage of a minority community are shocking. In this new century, can such a situation be allowed to exist in the heart of Europe? Some are proposing that the current situation be made permanent by granting "independence" to Kosovo in 2005. In my opinion this would be a cancer in the heart of Europe. The situation in neighboring countries cannot be ignored. Current escalating political and belligerent flashpoints of Macedonia, Presevo Valley and Montenegro cannot be underestimated in this historically volatile part of the Balkans. Therefore, every effort must be made to stabilize the situation.

Instead of such action, this is a propitious time for the leaders of Europe and the United States to put in place a proposal that will protect the rights of all. Representatives of the Albanian and Serb communities obviously would be part of the solution. Since Serbia regards Kosovo as one of its provinces, Serb leaders along with European Union leaders and the United States along with Albanian leaders from Kosovo must take the lead to prevent this festering problem from turning into a cancer that would destabilize the southern Balkans.

Time is running out, the international community—led by the European Union and the United States—must take the lead to assume that there will be hope for peace and stability in the future of Kosovo. The process toward a solution that would assure peace now and that could lead eventually to reconciliation between the two main communities in Kosovo must begin now. The classical term "protectorate" is the most appropriate solution. The nations of the civilized community would protect the rights of all the people in Kosovo until a just solution is agreed upon by all concerned.