

All is not normal in Kosovo



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Much can be said about the last nine years of nation-building in Kosovo. In some ways UNMIK and the rest of the International Community have been successful in improving the physical infrastructure, as well as creating a parliament, courts, and a new legal code. What it has failed to do, however, is create the conditions for a multiethnic democracy. Instrumental in this regard is an integration of the Albanian and Serb communities that lends itself to a sustainable peace and a multiethnic civil society supportive of democracy. Unfortunately, Serbs who do live in Kosovo are sometimes isolated from their Albanian neighbors in ways that allow Belgrade to support parallel structures in North Mitrovica and the various Serb "enclaves." Although the term "enclave" may no longer be applicable to every community, given the ability and desire of some Serbs to commute back and forth between home and larger towns and cities, there is still considerable distrust between the peoples that prevents them from living together. In addition, there is the issue of low returns of those Serbs who were displaced following the 1999 conflict.

Yet there is just so much the International Community can do to overcome this divisiveness and mistrust, for the problem has its roots in ethno-national identities and ideologies that continue to dominate how people view themselves and the Other and that have the full support of political parties. It is interesting that many Albanians as well as members of the International Community focus on interference from Belgrade as the principal obstacle for Serb integration within a society that is predominantly Albanian. They give the im-

pression that Serbs have no good reason irrespective of Belgrade's wishes to remain disconnected from mainstream Kosovar society. In fact, Serbs are told that the situation for them is much improved. Kosovo Premier Hashim Thaci himself has recently stated that "Kosovo has all the conditions for normal life."

A glance around Mitrovica and Prishtina suggests otherwise, however. If the presence of the state flag of the Republic of Serbia or Milosevic calendars are any indication of how important nationalism is for the people of North Mitrovica; and if the large photo of Adem Jashari that is draped on the Sports Complex, or the Albanian flags flying in lieu of the flag of Kosovo, or the numerous small cemeteries honoring KLA fighters is any indication of the importance of nationalism for Albanians in Prishtina and elsewhere in the country; then no one should be surprised by Serb reluctance to become integrated. The xenophobia and chauvinism that exists on both sides promotes parallel societies and allows Belgrade to have a disruptive influence on the Serb population within Kosovo.

The question that should be asked is, if the Albanian majority, who dominates society and who consequently have more maneuverability than the Serb minority, are unwilling to alter their preoccupation with nationalism and how they use cultural symbols to make visible their nationalism, then why not accept partition as the solution to the problem of a multiethnic society? It may be far more advantageous to abandon the idea of such a society, which may be doomed to failure given that it is not appreciated by many in either group, than to hold onto it if the goal is to improve the quality of life of as many Albanians and Serbs as possible. Isn't that what statesmanship is all about, improving the lives of people? Perhaps Thaci is not being honest with himself and his people: All is not normal in Kosovo!

German ambassador to Serbia Wolfram Maas stated that all the countries of western Balkans region have their future in the European Union. EU is a historic offer, but EU cannot solve the problems in the region.

„We can only help you to help yourselves“, Maas said and added that the EU gave financial help to Serbia amounting to two billions of EUR in past eight years.

New attractive prices for flights from Belgrade to several destinations in USA and Canada, during winter holidays, were announced by Lufthansa. Travelers can book return tickets from Belgrade to USA and Canada starting from 260 EUR up, taxes excluded. These tickets will be on sale until January 12.

All three Serbian education syndicates announced strike if their employees do not receive extra money to their salaries and if special collective contracts are not signed by December 15. They say they will not grade their students or issue certificates, and if their demands are not met, they will not start the next semester at all.

High Representative in BiH Miroslav Lajcak, said in Belgrade that Serbia, as a signatory of the Dayton Peace Accords, had a special role and responsibility in the aims of the countries of the region to join the EU and NATO. "It is very important that we have a good regional atmosphere. Serbia has a special responsibility towards Bosnia and Herzegovina," he said.

Serbian institutions, political parties and NGOs got together on December 10, Human Rights Day, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Representatives of the UN, the European Commission, the Serbian Human Rights Ministry, and the citizens, called for the improvement of the position of the Roma, disabled people, women, children and people infected with HIV. Labor and Social Policy Minister Rasim Ljajić said that he was pleased that 10 young people from vulnerable social groups had received scholarships on this day.

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