

Balkans Briefing

Pristina/Washington/Brussels, 10 October 2000



REACTION IN KOSOVO TO KOSTUNICA'S VICTORY

I. SUMMARY

While the world watched in fascination as mass demonstrations in Belgrade toppled Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic from power, Kosovo—where Milosevic had committed some of his worst crimes—had an almost eerie air of normalcy. On the night Milosevic fell, cafés were full and the usual crowd of young people strolled along Pristina's central artery, Mother Theresa Street. But Pristina's surface indifference masked serious unease about events in Serbia and especially about the swelling international welcome for newly elected President Vojislav Kostunica. Kosovo Albania's political circles, opinion leaders, and public, which for long had a head-in-the-sand approach toward the rise of the democratic opposition in Belgrade, are only beginning to come to grips with the changed political landscape in the Balkans caused by Milosevic's fall.

Initial reactions to Kostunica's election suggest the radicalisation of Kosovo Albanian opinion on issues such as co-operation with the international community and Kosovo's future status. If NATO governments go too far toward welcoming the new Serb democratic forces without sending some positive and reassuring signals to Kosovo, the already evident sense of impatience among Kosovo Albanians with aspects of the international mission could grow and eventually turn dangerous.

Over the next year or so, the international community should seek to turn the attention of both the Kostunica government and the Kosovo Albanian community toward confidence-building measures and dialogue that could lay the foundation for diplomatic engagement at the proper time. Over the longer run, the international community should recognise that Milosevic's departure makes it imperative to accelerate plans to create interim Kosovo-wide democratic institutions, with elections held no later than early 2001, and after that to move promptly to create a clearly understood roadmap for resolving Kosovo's final status.

II. PUBLIC REACTION

As the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) put together its well-planned campaign of elections and street protests that on 5 October led to Milosevic's downfall, Kosovo Albanian political leaders and media acted as if events in Serbia

were occurring on another planet. The day before Milosevic fell a senior official of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) revealed that his party had "made a decision not to decide" on taking a stance on events in Belgrade and added that, "No matter which party wins in Serbia, it will be a matter of complete indifference to Kosovo."¹

Most Kosovo Albanian papers reported events in Belgrade in a low-key fashion, usually in small articles drawn from wire service reports that were buried deep inside the papers. Not until 6 October, the day after Milosevic fell, did the Belgrade story make the front pages of some Kosovo Albanian papers. On the night Milosevic fell, journalists at a Kosovo news agency newly formed under international auspices refused to cover events in Belgrade at all. Journalists at the Kosovo evening television news program initially adopted a similar approach, until a foreign colleague galvanised them into using available live television feeds to produce more normal coverage of breaking events and to arrange a program of commentary by a couple of respected Pristina "talking heads." The Kosovo television journalists, however, rebelled at a possible interview with Kostunica, which could have been arranged live for Pristina virtually as the new president was assuming power and would have presented an opportunity to question the new president on issues of interest to Kosovo. Similarly, all prominent Kosovo Albanian politicians, except Alliance for Kosovo's Future (AAK) head Ramush Haradinaj, refused an offer to appear on Kosovo television to discuss events in Belgrade.²

The most extreme example of this "What, me worry?" approach was provided by *Bota Sot*, one of the largest circulation dailies in Kosovo. Its chief editor, Bajrush Morina, noted that he was carrying no news about events in Belgrade because Serbia is an "enemy" country.³ According to Morina, Kosovo Albanians were more interested in what was happening in world centres such as New York, Geneva, and London than in Belgrade. Asked whether he had not noticed and reported the enthusiastic reaction of leaders in these world centres to events in Belgrade, Morina replied that he edited out of his paper's coverage the parts of the foreign leaders' statements with which he disagreed. In a conversation which occurred a few days before the climactic events in Belgrade, Morina said that even if Milosevic fell he would not report it and, indeed, when Milosevic did fall the readers of *Bota Sot* remained blissfully unaware of the event, reading on the front page instead a tribute to martyred Albanian guerrilla leader Adem Jashari.

Only on 7 October, two days after Milosevic fell, did Kosovo Albanian political leaders or parties begin to make public statements on events in Belgrade and even then these were largely provoked by reaction to United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) chief Bernard Kouchner's efforts to enlist Albanian support for beginning a dialogue with Kostunica on Kosovo. Although most Albanian leaders professed to be pleased with the democratic changes in Serbia, they also expressed great scepticism about Kostunica's approach toward Kosovo and considerable unease about what

¹ Interview with ICG on 4 October 2000.

² Interview with ICG.

³ Interview with ICG.

they clearly regarded as an unseemly rush by the international community to embrace Kostunica without seeking some actions with respect to Kosovo, especially the release of the approximately one thousand Albanian prisoners held in Serb jails. All Kosovo leaders also emphasised their view that democratic changes in Serbia had no direct connection with Kosovo, which they universally said would only be satisfied with complete independence from Belgrade.

There has been little strategic thinking among Kosovo Albanian political leaders about how to respond to the advent of a new regime in Belgrade. As usual, however, Veton Surroi, the respected owner of Kosovo's leading daily, *Koha Ditore*, is well out in front. In a long editorial article on the implications for Kosovo of Milosevic's fall, Surroi wrote that the fall of Slobodan Milosevic was part of the historical processes that would make Kosovo free of Serbia forever. He called for a parallel process of building democracy in Serbia and Kosovo and set out a strategy for dealing with the new reality that included close co-ordination with Montenegro on future relations with Belgrade, prompt introduction of a market economic system, and setting up a functioning system of democratic self-government at the Kosovo level after the October municipal elections. Surroi said it was wrong for the international community to believe that Kosovo could be part of a democratic Serbia but urged Kosovo Albanians to defer discussion of Kosovo's final status until later.⁴

Disappointment and building anger with the West over its reaction to Kostunica are widespread throughout Kosovo Albanian society. But the views of a group of young, urban, and entrepreneurial Albanians who have been responsible for building some small but successful high tech enterprises in Kosovo over the past year are noteworthy. Among this group of entrepreneurs and activists, generally under 30, who over the past year have rejected opportunities to study and work overseas to build something lasting in their newly liberated society there exists extreme disappointment in the West for its rapid support of the new regime in Belgrade, coupled with growing personal cynicism that their dreams will never be realised at home. This group is sophisticated enough to recognise that the dynamics of the region are shifting far sooner than anyone had expected and that Kosovo could be lost in the shuffle. While most also recognise that a Europe without Milosevic is far better off, they are jaded enough to know that their little corner of the continent is currently not ready to compete with or even to complement a strengthened Serbia. Older Kosovars hope that the West will become wary of Kostunica when the true extent of his nationalism is revealed. These young entrepreneurs seem much more aware that in today's world economic interests can just as often trump political concerns. Regardless of when and where democracy will take hold, Serbia represents to the West a much more promising market, with more opportunities for privatisation and none of the tricky legal issues over ownership and status that have so far impeded formal development of the Kosovar economy. Young Kosovars whose stake at home just as often includes business or commercial interests as well as the political struggle inherited from the prior generation seem to hold the view that what they will lose commercially in the long run could matter more than the loss

⁴ *Koha Ditore*, 8 October 2000.

of independence. Young Kosovars dream of a free market and economic status within the EU in much the same way their elders dreamed of political and social liberation. All they were hoping for, said one young man, was just a few more years to learn to "...get it right. Serbs are ultimately more sophisticated. They know the game, we've barely begun to figure it out." Now they watch the West accept Serbia with open arms. This group has more opportunities to work, study and build new enterprises elsewhere, and if their fears about Serbia are realised they could just as easily leave on the heels of the international aid which they fear could soon be pouring out of Kosovo.

III. MILOSEVIC VERSUS KOSTUNICA

The way in which Kosovo Albanians view Milosevic and Kostunica is shaped by their perception that on the issue of Kosovo there is no essential difference between Milosevic and the (former) Serb opposition. At the beginning of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) election campaign—which Kosovo Albanians boycotted, as they have every Serb election campaign since 1990—it was widely said that if they would vote, Kosovo Albanians would support Milosevic in order to ensure that Serbia remained locked in international isolation. In at least one of the Kosovo Serb enclaves, the pro-Milosevic officials organising the 24 September FRY elections hopefully set up a polling place at the edge of the Serb territory to allow any Albanians who wished to do so the opportunity to vote for Milosevic. Some Albanians even went so far as to resurrect the old canard that the first statue put up in independent Kosovo would be to Milosevic—as the man whose brutal approach to Kosovo finally forced the international community to expel Serb forces in 1999.

When pressed, however, thoughtful Kosovo Albanians admit that they are, in fact, glad to see Milosevic disappear and even—albeit often through gritted teeth—acknowledge that they would prefer to see Kostunica rather than Milosevic ruling in Belgrade. Mahmut Bakalli, the former head of the Kosovo League of Communists who resigned in 1981 rather than consent to the use of Yugoslav troops against Albanian demonstrators and who retains considerable back-stage influence among political circles in Kosovo, said that only "shallow thinkers" believed it would be better for Kosovo if Milosevic stayed on. Serious Albanian political thinkers, according to Bakalli, recognised that in the final analysis it would be much easier for the world and for Kosovo Albanians to resolve issues of importance to Kosovo, with a democratic Serbia than with one ruled by Milosevic.⁵

There is, on the other hand, deep reserve in Kosovo regarding Kostunica, who is believed to be just as nationalistic as Milosevic on Kosovo but even more dangerous in some ways because of the support he is gaining from Western leaders. Two days before Milosevic fell, a senior Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) official commented that "Kostunica is just as nationalist as Milosevic himself."⁶ Kosovo Albanians reacted with anger and alarm to statements that Kostunica made during

⁵ Interview with ICG.

⁶ Interview with ICG.

the campaign to the effect that he expected Serb forces to return to Kosovo. Albanians also noted that Kostunica emphasised the suffering of the Serb people under NATO bombing but that he has never expressed any contrition or remorse for the sufferings of any of the peoples of the former Yugoslavia victimised by Milosevic, including the thousands of Albanians killed and hundreds of thousands expelled from their homes during the fighting in 1998 and 1999. In the feverish climate of ethnic hatred that currently prevails in Kosovo, a picture that was circulated widely in the Kosovo media of a distinctly uncomfortable looking Kostunica carrying an automatic rifle, allegedly during a visit to Kosovo during the 1998, led many Kosovo Albanian political leaders and ordinary citizens alike to assert that Kostunica—who, whatever his political tendencies may be, is personally a man of distinctly peaceful temperament—was a backer or even a member of the Serb para-military forces. A teenager summed up the opinion of many Kosovo Albanians by saying about Milosevic and Kostunica, “I hate them both.”⁷

IV. KOSOVO ALBANIAN POWERLESSNESS

The new regime in Belgrade is forcing Kosovo Albanians to confront two serious disadvantages they face in responding to Kostunica. The first is the lack of Kosovo Albanian political leadership with the stature, vision, and flexibility to deal with the challenges presented by a new regime in Belgrade. The second—even more galling to them—is the absence of Kosovo Albanian institutions with the authority and the legitimacy to represent Kosovo Albanian interests vis-à-vis Belgrade or the international community. The already visible consequences of this situation are the radicalising of Albanian opinion toward the Serbs and the international community and an insistence, which will only grow stronger as time progresses, on the prompt creation of the interim institutions of Kosovo self-rule that are authorised under UNSC 1244. Put another way, Kosovo Albanians were willing to be treated as wards of the international community as long as Belgrade was an international pariah. As Belgrade becomes an accepted member of the international community Kosovo Albanians will also demand a seat at the table.

Some of these underlying tensions became evident when UNMIK chief Bernard Kouchner held a special session of the Interim Advisory Council (IAC) on the evening of 6 October to discuss the impact of developments in Belgrade on Kosovo. Kouchner's initial public reaction was music to the ears of the Kosovo Albanians. He welcomed the changes in Belgrade but warned the international community against allowing attention and resources to be diverted from Kosovo. Kouchner also sharply criticised the statement by UN Human Rights Rapporteur Jiri Dienstbier that Milosevic should be offered a deal to escape war crimes prosecution if he voluntarily left power. But Kouchner reportedly ran into a buzz saw of Albanian opposition at the IAC when he sought support for a statement welcoming developments in Belgrade and authorising himself to open a dialogue on Kosovo with the new Yugoslav government. In what was described by participants afterwards as a stormy session, the Kosovo Albanian members of the IAC refused to endorse any

⁷ Comment by sixteen-year-old acquaintance of the author of this report.

statement on developments in Belgrade and questioned the desirability of initiating dialogue until the new government in Belgrade had made its intentions toward Kosovo clearer. After the meeting Albanian participants issued statements to the press that indicated considerable reserve toward the approach that Kouchner had proposed. LDK leader Ibrahim Rugova welcomed democratic changes in Serbia but said his objective remained—as it always has been—to work toward an independent Kosovo. The PDK representative said that they could not stop Kouchner from contacting Belgrade but expressed reserve toward developments in Serbia and criticised Kostunica for saying that he intended to seek the return of Kosovo to Serbia, which the PDK representative said was inadmissible.⁸

V. KOSOVO ALBANIAN RADICALISATION

The radicalisation of Kosovo Albanian opinion as a result of Kostunica's victory will have an effect on the way Kosovo Albanians view future co-operation with the international community and on the political constellation of forces within the Kosovo Albanian community itself. Demands for independence—which the Albanians never abandoned but have been willing to downplay in recent months as the international mission moved forward, however haltingly, with implementation of UNSC 1244—have once more risen to the top of the agenda. Typical of Kosovo Albanian reactions in this regard was that of the commander of the Kosovo Protection Corps and former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) Chief of Staff Agim Ceku who said "Kosovo has separated from Serbia forever."⁹

Impatience with the perceived slowness and incompetence of the international mission—already strong—will rise. AAK chief Ramush Haradinaj observed that, "The UN administration is killing the future of Kosovo because it is not working."¹⁰ This kind of anger at the international mission will intensify more rapidly if duplicity is added to charges of incompetence. Some within the UNMIK administration have shared their fears that Western governments—France and the United States particularly—could take advantage of the upcoming November European Union (EU) summit in Zagreb on South-eastern Europe to derail the further development of independent political and economic institutions in Kosovo until its future with Serbia is worked out. This is placing enormous pressure on concerned UN officials to complete as much as possible of Kosovo's legal and political framework in the short run, essentially by the end of October, in anticipation of pre-emptive pressure that may soon arrive from UN headquarters. "Right now no one in New York is thinking about the effect (of changes in Serbia) on Kosovo," a senior UN official claimed. "It's been five days and I have yet to receive a single call. We have to push something, anything, through before someone in New York realises the local impact of this thing and decides to pick up the phone."¹¹

⁸ *Koha Ditore*, 7 October 2000.

⁹ *Zeri*, 7 October 2000.

¹⁰ Interview with ICG.

¹¹ Interview with ICG.

If the international community's new-found love affair with Belgrade is seen as compromising Kosovo's desire for independence, support for hard-line elements within the Kosovo Albanian community will likely rise. Before Milosevic fell, a senior figure within the Kosovo Protection Corps is reported to have told Western diplomats that a change of regime in Belgrade, together with the sweeping LDK victory in the October municipal elections that many observers expect, could increase the strength of radical elements and even cause the KLA to prepare for a renewed armed struggle.

Another—and more positive—reaction to the victory of the Serb opposition will be to stimulate Kosovo Albanian pressure on the international community to move more promptly to create the Kosovo-wide interim institutions of democratic self-rule that are called for under UNSC 1244. Kosovo Albanians had argued for holding Kosovo-wide election in the fall of 2000. They acquiesced—because they had no choice—in the international decision to hold only municipal elections. Kosovo Albanians understand—although the international mission in Kosovo seems not to—how disadvantaged they now are in not having their own institutions capable of dealing on a basis of equal democratic legitimacy with the new democratic government in Belgrade. Even before Milosevic's fall Kosovo Albanian leaders were becoming more publicly vocal in demanding the introduction of an interim Kosovo constitutional structure promptly after the October municipal elections, which Kosovo Albanians now see as decidedly secondary affair. AAK leader Ramush Haradinaj has said that he will demand that Kosovo-wide elections be held in the spring of 2001 in order have Kosovo's first democratic President inaugurated in June 2001, two years after the end of the 1999 war.¹² Similar demands can be expected from other Kosovo Albanian leaders as a result of the changes in Belgrade.¹³

VI. KOSOVO SERBS

Support for the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) was widespread among Kosovo Serbs, not out of enthusiasm for Milosevic but rather because Belgrade's instruments of coercion and propaganda remained strong throughout the Kosovo Serb community and because many Kosovo Serbs did not see a better way to return Belgrade's rule to Kosovo and end what they all hoped was the temporary nightmare of international rule. To a certain extent, Kostunica's ability to control developments within the Kosovo Serb community will depend on how promptly and how effectively he takes charge of the propaganda, police, and financial instruments Milosevic used to solidify his control over the minds and pocketbooks, if not the hearts, of the Kosovo Serbs.

However, Kostunica's victory is already having a major impact on politics and personalities in the Kosovo Serb community. In some ways this impact will mirror the radicalisation within the Kosovo Albanian community. The sight of world leaders rushing to embrace Kostunica, who throughout his campaign sharply criticised

¹² Interview with ICG.

¹³ Interview with ICG.

NATO's 1999 war against Serbia and the international presence in Kosovo, will diminish the already tenuous willingness of the Kosovo Serbs to co-operate with the international mission, which they view as responsible for failing to protect them against Albanian attacks after the 1999 war and for working to create a Kosovo separate from Belgrade.

The tenor of the response of Kosovo Serbs to developments in Belgrade will nevertheless be different from that of the Kosovo Albanians. Kosovo Albanians—now less confident that future trends will go their way, meaning toward independence—are already reacting in a mood of anger, resentment, and threats of future non co-operation. Kosovo Serbs, by contrast, seeing from the outpouring of Western support for Kostunica that their dream of the return of Kosovo to Belgrade's rule may not be so unrealistic after all, will react with a tone of smug self-satisfaction, calling for a change in the policies of the international mission and for Kosovo Albanians to accept an outcome less than independence. This switch in mood was already evident in the above-mentioned 6 October IAC session. Although the Kosovo Albanians reacted angrily to Kouchner's efforts to establish dialogue with Belgrade, the Kosovo Serb representative on the IAC, Rada Trajkovic, was cited afterwards as welcoming international support for the new government in Belgrade and for calling upon Albanians and Serbs together to build up the institutions of "Serbia and Yugoslavia."¹⁴

On the personnel side, Oliver Ivanovic, the charismatic leader of the Mitrovica Serbs, is likely to enhance his standing as a result of the changes in Belgrade. Ivanovic endorsed Kostunica during the election campaign and stood by Kostunica during the latter's ill-fated campaign visit to Mitrovica, when rock-and-vegetable-throwing Milosevic thugs forced Kostunica off the podium. Other beneficiaries of the new regime are likely to be Marko Jaksic, Kostunica's representative in Mitrovica, and Momcilo Trajkovic, leader of the Serb National Resistance party, who was spotted with Kostunica on the podium in Belgrade as the latter made his first victory speech. Bishop Artemije and Father Sava, the international community's anointed "moderate Serbs," are likely to find their support among Kosovo Serbs even more reduced.

VII. POSSIBLE FLASHPOINTS

There are several potential flashpoints where actions by the international community or the Kostunica government could cause problems in Kosovo.

The first possible flashpoint is the pace and conditions of international community moves to integrate Belgrade into the world community. Across-the-board actions such as lifting all sanctions, restoring full diplomatic relations, and reintegrating Belgrade in international organisations without seeking anything in return regarding Kosovo would have a disastrous and potentially dangerous effect on the mood of the Kosovo Albanians. Naim Jerliu, a Deputy Chairman of the LDK, asserted that, "lifting sanctions without conditions on Kosovo would increase the strength of nationalist

¹⁴ *Koha Ditore*, 7 October 2000.

and extremist forces in Kosovo."¹⁵ Another senior LDK official said that lifting sanctions immediately without conditions could lead to violence in Kosovo.¹⁶

LDK leader Ibrahim Rugova made a distinction between lifting economic sanctions, such as the oil embargo, which he said would help democratic change through their positive impact on the daily lives of Serbs, and broader steps such as recognition or membership in international bodies, which he said should only be undertaken after achieving certain guarantees regarding Kosovo from the new Kostunica government.¹⁷ In recent days a number of Kosovo Albanian leaders and political parties have issued statements on reintegration which basically boil down to three demands: release of the estimated 700-1,000 Kosovo Albanian prisoners still held in Serb jails, extradition of indicted war criminals to the UN-created tribunal in The Hague, and recognition of the right of the Kosovo Albanians to self-determination. If, however, the international community allows Serbia to reintegrate without gaining the release of the Albanian prisoners, seized by Serb forces at the end of the war and held illegally and reportedly in poor conditions since then, the anger of the Kosovo Albanian community could be re-directed from Milosevic toward the new democratic government and the international community, jeopardising future co-operation with the international community.

Another potential flash point would be the return of the up to 999 Serb troops that UNSC 1244 stipulates could be allowed into Kosovo. Before the FRY election, the Milosevic regime had demonstrated a newly formed unit of elite special forces troops, consisting of exactly 999 men, that it said was intended to return to Kosovo. During the election campaign Kostunica said repeatedly, including during his brief foray into Kosovo, that he intended to make it possible for Serb forces to return to Kosovo. So far, KFOR has refused to allow these forces to return on grounds that they would be a de-stabilising element. Should the international community reverse this policy and decide to "make a gesture" to Kostunica by allowing the return of these forces, the result would be catastrophic. Kosovo Albanians would turn against the international mission overnight. The Serb forces—together with the Serb population in the enclaves—would come under immediate Albanian attack and would need sizeable and permanent NATO guards to survive. AAK leader Haradinaj said that if the 999 Serb troops returned to Kosovo, "it would mean that the KLA would once more return to the field."¹⁸

The return of large numbers of Kosovo Serbs—some 150,000 of whom are believed to be sheltering in Serbia, having fled Kosovo in the wake of the 1999 war—would be another possible flashpoint. During the election campaign Kostunica said that all Serb refugees from Kosovo should promptly return and sharply criticised the international community for not doing enough to assist this. One of Kostunica's strongest backers in Kosovo is Oliver Ivanovic, who has long advocated a more

¹⁵ Interview with ICG.

¹⁶ Interviews with ICG.

¹⁷ Interview with ICG.

¹⁸ Interview with ICG.

robust approach toward Serb returns. Radicalisation of the Kosovo Albanian community because of the Kostunica victory, however, will likely make more difficult even the limited returns that have occurred so far. Depending on how far this radicalisation goes, more aggressive Albanian actions against Serbs in the enclaves cannot be ruled out, particularly in isolated areas such as Orahovac or Obilic. Large-scale, internationally assisted Serb returns, which the international community flirted with briefly in the spring and early summer of 2000, would probably become even more difficult without significantly expanded and permanent armed protection. Albanian resistance to the more limited, step-by-step returns carried out under the auspices of British forces as part of the "Trojan" program will probably also mount and might threaten the results of Trojan, so far the only successful program of Serb returns actually accomplished by the international mission.

Another major complication could arise if the international community invited the Kostunica government to participate in negotiations over Kosovo's future without at the same time allowing Kosovo Albanians to participate. This is another area where the absence of interim democratic institutions in Kosovo could exacerbate tensions. As Kouchner discovered during the 6 October IAC meeting mentioned above, Kosovo Albanians simply will not recognise the right of the UN to negotiate on their behalf on issues which affect their future status. If Kostunica is, as expected, to attend the November EU summit on Southeast Europe in Zagreb, it is imperative that a way also be found to allow Kosovo Albanian representatives to participate.

Another obvious potential flashpoint is how Milosevic and other senior indicted Serb war criminals are treated by the international community. Kosovo Albanian leaders recognise the sensitivity of the issue for Kostunica and are prepared to cut him and the international community some slack regarding timing. Any attempt to allow Milosevic and other senior indicted Serb war criminals to escape prosecution, however, would subvert the prestige and effectiveness of the international mission in Kosovo.

The most serious potential flashpoint would be if the Kosovo Albanian community became convinced that the advent of a new government in Belgrade had led the international community to rule out independence as an eventual outcome for Kosovo. Albanians understand that independence now is not an option. They also understand that in the modern world independent states have many limits on their sovereignty and they are prepared to consider regional arrangements with neighbouring states, including Serbia. Kosovo Albanians have not the slightest interest in "substantial autonomy" as an end point in their relationship with Serbia. They are convinced that the international community has an obligation—some claim to believe that they have been promised this—to transform what they consider the *de facto* independence they now enjoy from Serbia into *de jure* independence within a few years. Should Kosovo Albanians conclude that this is impossible, their attitude toward the international mission in Kosovo would shift fundamentally. Discussing this prospect, a senior PDK official said with evident bitterness that the international community had required the KLA to disarm and if it now turned its back on Kosovo

independence, "we are ready to fight and to die," but the responsibility for the what he called the ensuing "genocide" would rest on the international community.¹⁹

VIII. CONCLUSION

With good will on all sides—seldom achievable in the Balkans—the immediate impact in Kosovo of a Kostunica victory need not be dire, provided the international community avoids the flashpoints described above. In the short run, the new Kostunica government in Belgrade will likely be preoccupied with consolidating power internally and with working out its new relationship with the outside world. It is not yet clear that it will have an interest in seeking immediately to engage on Kosovo, although it will continue to adopt tough public stances on such things as the return of Serb forces and Serb refugees to Kosovo.

Or so the Kosovo Albanians hope, because they have no interest in seeing Kosovo become part of the international agenda with Belgrade until after Kosovo-wide elections create their own interim democratic institutions and leaders capable of participating on an equal basis in any discussions on Kosovo's future status.

Over the next year, accordingly, the international community should encourage both Belgrade and the Kosovo Albanians to lay the foundations for reasonable engagement by, to the extent possible, avoiding mutually inflammatory rhetoric and actions and exploring confidence-building measures and dialogue that will facilitate more serious diplomatic engagement at the proper time. All players—Kostunica, the Kosovo Albanians, and the international community—should focus on the immediate steps necessary for good-faith implementation of UNSC 1244, avoiding the short-run flashpoints described above and efforts to prejudge any potential option for the final political settlement of Kosovo's status.

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¹⁹ Interview with ICG.