



## CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND RECONCILIATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

### Kosovo Roundtable Discussion, May 2004, Thessaloniki

#### REPORT

The roundtable discussion on the March 2004 violence in Kosovo brought to light many of the complexities of the social and political problems that this region faces. The event was entitled, “Reality Bites – The Regional Implications of the March 2004 Violence in Kosovo” and took place in Thessaloniki on Sunday, 23 May 2004. It was organised by the Association for Democracy in the Balkans, a Greek NGO based in Thessaloniki, and a Dutch partner organisation, the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE).

The panel consisted of Dusan Batakovic, Ambassador of Serbia-Montenegro to Greece, Erhard Busek, Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Saso Ordanoski, Political Analyst and Editor, Forum Magazine, Gazmend Pula, Head of Kosovo Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, and Richard Zink, Director, European Agency for Reconstruction. The moderator was Nenad Sebek, Executive Director of the CDRSEE.

The discussion focused on the recent violent incidents in the region of Kosovo and their wider implications. The March events force the International Community to rethink whether it and all the parties involved achieved what they had expected after five years of efforts and whether there is only an illusion of peace and budding prosperity in the region. The violence brings the opportunity to dissect the roles and responsibilities of the various actors in Kosovo, and to ask: what will it take to move Kosovo from the bitter reality of today into the dream situation we would like it to be in?

The discussion was open, free and creative. All the participants spoke outside of protocol and regardless of office, expressing their own personal sincere views. For that reason, in the summary of the event that follows, the quotes are not attributed to any participant, since the discussion was held under this precondition.

#### **March 2004: A disaster or not?**

The March events resulted into 19 people been killed, 750 wounded and 2 missing. 800 houses were destroyed. 4-4,500 Serbs left some 30 villages and towns. The eruption of violence also served as a setback for all the efforts of the international community to promote a multiethnic and democratic society. The participants agreed with this observation, and with these figures.

The panellists’ responses to the violence showed that there are both positive and negative conclusions to be made. While certainly being tragic, the violence also brings an opportunity. One participant suggested that it was not necessarily a total disaster since the violence was

contained and there were no spill-over effects. Another view was that this setback serves as an opportunity for the international community to revise and rethink its commitment in Kosovo. There were also the views that it indeed was a disaster for both Albanians and Serbs and that it demonstrated the failure of the international community, while others recognised the general progress achieved so far in the province.

### **Need for Dialogue**

The lack of any substantial progress in building a multiethnic society in Kosovo raised a number of issues. One main point was that the Albanians and the Serbs themselves need to find a common interest in building a democratic society, as the international community is now both part of the problem and part of the solution.

One participant stressed the need for communication - an honest discussion between politicians from both sides - that is simply lacking. Another participant suggested that there is no will on either side to take part in discussions, which only take place at the parliamentary level due to the pressure of the International Community. A third view complained that the 'need more time' argument is not an adequate approach, and that both sides should look for acceptable solutions for the future starting today.

One panellist explained that the leadership in Kosovo is short-sighted, and fails to recognise that it is the responsibility of the majority, the Kosovar Albanians, to protect the rights of the minority, the Kosovar Serbs. This panellist claimed that 'Albanian elites cannot see further than their noses' and that they are 'shooting themselves in the foot' by alienating Kosovo Serbs. He pointed out that Kosovo Serbs are not second-class citizens, they are "no class" citizens and that the Albanian side should fully engage Kosovo Serbs if they want to advance their ambitions of an independent, and not partitioned, Kosovo. In other words, it is in the interest of all people living in Kosovo to create a multiethnic society, but the leadership there fails to see that.

An interesting comparison was done between the Ohrid and Dayton models for Kosovo. One participant said that while the international community was initially pushing for an Ohrid model, they are now shifting towards a Dayton one. From the experiences of FYR of Macedonia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an integrated multi-ethnic society is a far more functional and effective arrangement than an ethnically divided state. He further remarked that Kosovar Albanians will lose more with the Dayton model; they should aim for a solution based on the Ohrid model.

### **Topics for Discussion**

Another problem that was pointed out was that while the Serbs are ready to address issues such as freedom of movement, self-government, territorial autonomy, return of refugees, the Albanian side is not, and sticks to topics such as transport and energy.

A participant added that instead of discussing how to create a better society and economy, schooling and investment, the Albanians keep on mentioning only one issue: status. Focusing a lot on status does not bring real progress and just reinforces the already existing lack of confidence and trust. Furthermore, the civil society dialogue would be far more effective in building up understanding and trust if it could move beyond the issue of status.

## **EU involvement?**

The panellists discussed the issue of UNMIK and the need to redefine its role in Kosovo. Also many panellists suggested that the EU should assume more responsibility in Kosovo. One participant suggested that there have been high expectations without any relevant instruments being developed. UNMIK cannot deliver with its present structure and further engaging the EU is necessary, “Europeanising” UNMIK in a sense. Another panellist noted that there is not an effective EU representation in Kosovo and more is need to stimulate discussions from the EU side. A view was also heard that both Albanians and Serbs are pushing for a *fait accompli* and thus the rigorous engagement of the International Community was needed.

## **Kosovo: 10 years from now?**

The last question dealt with what the panellists would like to see in Kosovo in 10 years from now. The prevailing view was that Kosovo will be at peace with its neighbours (many of which would be NATO members or moving towards EU accession); it will have achieved substantial economic growth, and that the Kosovars themselves would run the government with the help, of course, of the International Community.

Other panellists spoke about a Kosovo that is tolerant and democratic where displaced persons will have returned, and also that it will have fulfilled most standards and will have reach enviable levels of Europeanisation. The status will still be a question-mark with a complicated arrangement with Belgrade for the Serbian population.