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Kosovo's final status endgame: A challenge for Europe's security and stability

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Featuring:

His Excellency **Alexandros Mallias**, Ambassador of Greece to the United States
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On May 11, 2007 Janusz Bugajski and Ambassador Alexandros Mallias led a lunch discussion on Kosovo's looming final status resolution and its long-term impact on the region.

The UN Security Council has begun discussing the recommendations of UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari on the future of Kosovo. Recently, a 15-member delegation of representatives of all UN Security Council member-states undertook a fact-finding mission to Belgrade and Prishtina. Mallias and Bugajski reviewed these developments and discussed the UNSC vote on Kosovo's international status, Russia's position, as well as the Euro-Atlantic prospects for the broader region.

Janusz Bugajski

Kosovo's status remains the last unsolved question from the turbulent dissolution of former Yugoslavia. Kosovo is now simmering as events are unfolding. The economic situation is desperate and a final status decision is essential. The expectations of the people in Kosovo are higher this year and if the status question is left unresolved, it could spark unrest.

If Martti Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovo's supervised independence is not accepted by the U.N. Security Council, there are fears that frustration in Kosovo could destabilize the territory, bring down the government, undermine the international peacekeeping mission, and precipitate attacks against the Serbian minority. In addition, the lack of clarity over Kosovo's status and its borders could encourage militants to start a new insurgency movement to win by conflict what evidently cannot be won by peaceful means.

Furthermore, any further delay on final status resolution could bring a reversal of progress for Serbia itself. After three months of political deadlock, now the new speaker of parliament is a very well-known anti-EU and anti-American leader of the Radical party.¹ By May 14, there will be more clarity regarding Serbia's ability to form a

¹ This presentation took place 2 days before Tomislav Nikolic resigned from the post of speaker of parliament, and before a new government coalition was formed..



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government; otherwise there will have to be new general elections. Paradoxically, it is better for Serbia to have Radicals in power when Kosovo's status is finalized, because they will be discredited by been seen to have "lost" the territory.

The other factor in the region that needs attention is the role of Russia which has sought to reassert its influence in different parts of Central and Eastern Europe and may block Kosovo's path to statehood through the UNSC. However, Kosovo's independence could unfold even without Russian approval. The U.S. and the European Union could approve the provisions of the Ahtisaari plan and move ahead with its planned mission to replace UNMIK (the United Nations Mission in Kosovo). Alternatively, a new plan could be devised once Kosovo declares independence and is recognized by the EU states, in which case Brussels and Prishtina, together with Washington, could negotiate the role and size of the EU mission.

Independence has advantages for Kosovo. Statehood will provide clarity for foreign investors. The newly established free-trade zone in Southeast Europe will encourage free trade and investment. The enhanced EU mission will provide oversight in the process of legal and structural reform. And Kosovo's large, young population will enable flexibility and adaptability as the new country finds its niche in the global economy.

In contrast, the only factions that will gain from the delay of status will be Kosovo's militants, Serbian radicals, and Russia's neo-imperialists.

Ambassador Alexandros Mallias

What we ultimately want to see in the West Balkans is a stable future with economic development. According to the latest World Bank and IMF reports, Southeast Europe has tremendous potential for economic growth and for attracting substantial foreign investment.

Today in Zagreb there is a meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European countries, which represents the 10th summit of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP). The event has brought together leaders from the entire region working on a common agenda and it is an important milestone compared to 15 years ago. SEECP has come a long way since the Crete summit in 1997, when for the first time since the end of the Second World War, a Serbian president met the Albanian prime minister at the time.

The countries meeting in Zagreb today have one common denominator: working together to move ahead with future entry in EU. Violent conflicts are a thing of the past and we can see the example of Croatia, which has emerged from the wars and now is a showcase for all former Yugoslav Republics. It has been difficult for successive Croatian governments to carry out fundamental reforms in such areas as the return of the Serbian



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displaced minority and the restitution of property. But they succeeded nonetheless and now Zagreb is on a firm path toward EU and NATO integration. There has also been tremendous progress for Romania and Bulgaria, which 15 years ago was imaginable.

This week there were two separate draft resolutions introduced in the UN Security Council, one by EU and U.S officials, and the other by Russia. Ethnic Albanians have been expecting independence since 1999, but they were disappointed with UN resolution 1244. Today we all agree that the present status cannot be sustained and that the pre-1999 status cannot be restored. Ahtisaari's proposal is clearly for independence but with international monitoring. From the EU's point of view, we need the legitimacy of the UN Security Council to replace resolution 1244 and engage Kosovo along with Serbia in a process that will lead to EU membership.

We advocate the need to offer Serbia a fast-track vehicle for membership in the EU. Brussels sent a clear message to Belgrade that they need to create a government and if they speed up reforms, the EU will react positively. If Serbia wants to become a member of the Union, they need to have accountability and compatibility as requirements for every member.

In the two draft resolutions on Kosovo, there are elements and issues that can and should be revisited. First, is the issue of refugees and internally displaced people. We need a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Kosovo. Then there are efforts for the protection of religious sites and for administrative decentralization.

The Balkans provide a tremendous economic opportunities and Greece has already invested USD 20 billion in the region. Kosovo has a lot of potential in the energy sector because it has the best lignite in the region and the largest deposits.

Kosovo is not merely a Balkan issue but a European issue. However, this does not mean that the EU can resolve the status question without U.S. and Russia. We need to engage the Russians and the EU is currently doing so. Greece has a political and economic interest in the region and there is no exit strategy for us. Our main goal is to make the region a generator of stability instead of a consumer, and at the same time provide it with a clear European perspective.