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**Kosovo's mark**  
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### Nationalism, Democracy, and Power in the Balkans

The war in **Kosovo marked** a potential turning point for the Balkans. NATO's military defeat of Serbia, the International Criminal Tribunal's indictment of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes, and the commitment of large numbers of NATO troops to peacekeeping in **Kosovo** reflect new policy realities. The United States and NATO have accepted the responsibility of maintaining a substantial security presence in the region until a democratic government replaces Milosevic's regime, which remains the prime source of regional instability. The end of Milosevic's reign is the only basis for preventing further conflict and creating the conditions that will permit US and NATO troops to withdraw from the region.

Democracy is beginning to catch up with nationalism in the Balkans, and Western allies are emerging in the region. Serbia's democratic forces are more united than they were in the recent past and now have the support of Western democracies. **Kosovo** is no longer subject to Serbian repression and is trying to establish democratic institutions. Montenegro has made significant progress toward establishing a multiethnic, democratic government and is easing away from its federation with Serbia. Croatia has elected a reform-minded democratic parliament and president, who have begun to dismantle the extreme nationalist policies of the late Franjo Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union. Progress by democratic forces in Croatia will enable the Bosnians to pursue new opportunities for restoration of territorial integrity and national unity within a democratic, multiethnic context.

But the danger of additional Balkan conflicts involving NATO still exists. The violent destruction of Yugoslavia that began nearly ten years ago may not have run its course. Serbian democrats may lack the power to oust Milosevic, who is unlikely to peacefully accept the end of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and may well intervene militarily in Montenegro. Washington will face difficult decisions in attempting to deter looming conflict in Montenegro, to encourage Serbian democratic forces to continue resisting Milosevic, and to deal constructively with the Kosovo Albanians' expectations of independence. Dealing with these numerous challenges requires an understanding of how the differing political situations in each region will shape US policy.

#### Pressure on Serbia

Serbian dictator and indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic is down, but not yet out. He remains president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY--the federation of Serbia and Montenegro--but presides over territory significantly reduced from the original Yugoslavia. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia have successively abandoned a Yugoslavia dominated by anti-democratic Serbia; Kosovo is transitioning toward independence; and Montenegro is turning away from the truncated FRY because of Milosevic's unrelenting hardline anti-Western policies.

The most significant political change in the Balkans during the past year was the

decision by the United States and its European allies to cease treating Milosevic as a stabilizing force in the region and instead to seek his isolation from the international community and replacement by democratic forces. This marked a reversal of the policy established after the November 1995 Dayton peace agreement, when the West lifted many of the wartime sanctions against Serbia and intensified meetings with Milosevic to facilitate implementation of the Dayton agreement. In embracing Milosevic, the West counterproductively froze cooperation with opposition Serbian democrats prepared to challenge his rule.

The war in Kosovo convinced NATO that the long-term deployment of its troops would be necessary to counter the threat Milosevic's government poses to Balkan peace and stability. After he was defeated by NATO and indicted by the Tribunal, Serbia's re-energized democratic forces began to receive significant support from Western democracies. Thus began a long-term effort to shift the balance of power within Serbia away from extreme nationalists.

Sustained Western support will be as crucial to the success of Serbia's democratic forces as it was for Poland's Solidarity movement in the 1980s. Nationalism is too deeply embedded in Serbian politics and has been too successfully exploited by Serbia's extreme nationalist ruling politicians for opposition democrats to succeed entirely on their own. Moreover, the Serbian national myth of victimhood rooted in their 1389 defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Empire has left even the democratic forces susceptible to nationalist stirrings. Only a restructured democratic movement that includes representatives of Serbia's ethnic minorities can resist these nationalist passions and reshape the political system.

This rising democratic movement has several policy implications for the United States. The first is timing: while US-led support will strengthen the Alliance for Change (a coalition of about 40 democratic political parties and organizations that is the primary vehicle for democratization in Serbia), US and allied efforts cannot dictate the timing of political change in Serbia. The danger is that Washington policymakers might allow this year's electoral calendar to influence policy by pushing for early results that can be touted during the US political campaign. The Clinton administration must project a US commitment to Serbian democratization no matter how long it takes the democratic forces to succeed. This longterm commitment is necessary to overcome the concern of Serbian democrats that Washington will drift back into a relationship with Milosevic if the democrats do not produce early results.

Leadership is another critical factor. The Serbian democratic movement has begun to produce leaders of genuine stature and capability, many of whom are emerging in towns outside of Belgrade. Mayors Velimir Ilic of Cacak and Zoran Zivkovic of Nis (Serbia's second largest city) are two prime examples. Ilic is one of Serbia's most popular politicians because of his courageous resistance to the regime's war aims and tactics during the Kosovo conflict. His town, Cacak, was among the first to launch anti-Milosevic protests following the end of fighting; by contrast, the first such demonstration in Belgrade took place two months later. The United States can help maintain a balance between the Belgrade-based political parties and the democratically governed towns of Serbia by maintaining links with a broad array of democratic politicians.

Washington will need to organize a consensus within NATO to act forcefully against Milosevic if he tries to provoke military confrontations with Serbia's neighbors. Milosevic has the capability to destabilize Kosovo, Bosnia, or Montenegro at will. A violent crackdown against the domestic opposition would pose a difficult policy dilemma for NATO, as Milosevic currently appears determined to wear down the opposition. Local elections must be held in 2000, and the regime intends to use them to oust as many of the democratic mayors as possible. Milosevic has already used the rubber-stamp Serbian parliament to chip away at the powers of municipalities. As a

fallback tactic, Milosevic could seek a "government of national unity" by offering significant ministerial portfolios to the opposition to entice them into office, and then use them to seek reconstruction aid from the West that would keep him in power.

If Washington wearies of its commitment to sustained confrontation with Milosevic, US public support for Serbian democratization will diminish. In that case, US political leaders would probably fall back on a more passive course of action and treat Serbia as a pariah state until Milosevic passes from the scene.

#### Hope in Croatia

Croatia, the second most powerful state of the former Yugoslavia and perhaps militarily stronger than Serbia, achieved a dramatic democratic breakthrough this year. In the January 3 parliamentary elections, a six-party opposition coalition defeated the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (known by its Croatian initials as the HDZ) and captured a majority. Their victory reflected a shift away from nationalist concerns generated by the war for independence against Serbia. Secure in Croatia's independence, the electorate expressed its deep-seated frustration with the HDZ's endemic cronyism and corruption and its failure to manage the economy.

The democratic tide gathered momentum for its second big test, the election of a president to replace Franjo Tudjman, the authoritarian leader of Croatia's independence movement who died in December 1999. The HDZ candidate did not even qualify for the runoff vote, and Stipe Mesic, who pledged to cut off Zagreb's support to the Bosnian Croats and send all indicted Croat war criminals to the Hague Tribunal, was elected. With the presidency and parliament under their control, Croatia's democratic forces led by President Mesic and Prime Minister Ivica Racan have begun the arduous task of establishing authority over the military, secret police, and other key state institutions and relieving the HDZ's stranglehold over the economy.

The United States has an important stake in the continued success of the Croatian democrats, who seek to open the political system to sustained democratic and market-oriented economic reforms that would form a bulwark against the revival of extreme nationalism. The democrats can also foster an atmosphere in which significant numbers of Croatian Serb refugees would feel secure in returning to Croatia. This would enable the United States to treat Croatia as a dependable partner in coordinating regional political, economic, and security policies.

The success of the Croatian democratic coalition and the willingness of the United States and Europe to provide an immediate down payment on future economic and financial assistance has provided a model of democratic change for Serbian democrats to follow. Such change can help release Serbs from their enthusiasm for extreme nationalist policies. Economic and democratic assistance demonstrate that the West is willing to follow through on pledges of economic support once democratic elections have been held. This precedent would encourage the Serbian people to calculate carefully the benefits that Western support for the Alliance for Change can bring.

The Croatian democrats' victory may have a significant impact on Bosnia. Herzegovina, the nearly 15 percent of Bosnia mainly controlled by Bosnian Croats under the Dayton agreement, was virtually annexed by Croatia and treated as a de facto Croatian province. The HDZ had given Bosnian Croats the right to obtain Croatian citizenship, vote in Croatian elections, and hold several seats in the Croatian parliament. The influence of the Bosnian Croats in Croatian politics sparked broad resentment among Croats. The new democratic government has made a commitment to curtail the influence of the Bosnian Croats and to cooperate with efforts by the international community to restore the multiethnic character and territorial integrity of Bosnia. Croatian democrats, who desperately want to

integrate Croatia into European political and economic institutions, recognize that they will not be accepted into the European community so long as they maintain control of Herzegovina.

#### Fractures in Bosnia

The 1995 Dayton peace agreement that ended the war in Bosnia came at the price of the country's de facto partition. Croatia and Serbia exercise significant influence over nearly two-thirds of Bosnia. The international community lacks the resolve to address this situation and is shifting much of its assistance from Bosnia to Kosovo. In the absence of US political will and leadership, significant change toward democratization and restoration of Bosnian national unity will depend upon the policies of neighboring Croatia and Serbia.

Resistance to change among Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs is reinforced by the failure of NATO troops to arrest indicted war criminals Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, the respective wartime political and military leaders of the Bosnian Serbs. In particular, Karadzic's continued freedom to move about the French-patrolled sector of Bosnia over four years after Dayton signatories agreed to turn him over to the Hague tribunal has persuaded hardliners that they can avoid compromises by waiting out the departure of Western forces.

The arrest of Karadzic would undermine this comfortable assumption. The United States and NATO could follow up arrests with an initiative to return refugees to regions controlled by other ethnic groups (for example, Croats and Muslims to the Bosnian Serb region, Croats and Serbs to the Bosnian Muslim region, and Serbs and Muslims to the Bosnian Croat region). Over 500,000 such "minority refugees" remain displaced despite pledges by Bosnian leaders and the international community to secure their return. Less than 100,000 have returned, largely to the more secure Bosnian Muslim region. Any initiative to return minority refugees depends upon the resolve of NATO governments to authorize their troops in SFOR to provide expanded protection. It is doubtful that the United States would muster the political will for such an initiative during an election year. This means that refugees themselves must bear the risks of "spontaneous" returns until NATO alters its policy of avoiding risk.

The core problem in Bosnia, however, is the bias of the Dayton agreement that legitimizes ethnicity-based control of the political system. This has left the three nationalist parties that fought the war with significant leverage over the reconstruction and reconciliation effort. None of them has displayed a willingness to cede political influence over their own entities in return for multiethnic democracy under a stronger central government. In fact, central government institutions established under Dayton remain dysfunctional. No single office-not even the presidency of Bosnia-is elected by all Bosnians. This system explains why Bosnia remains a derivative state, where significant constructive political and economic change remain hostage to progress toward democratization in neighboring Croatia and Serbia and to the political resolve of NATO, the European Union, the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations.

#### Guidance in Kosovo

The war in Kosovo ended repressive Serbian control over the Kosovo Albanians, who constitute about 90 percent of Kosovo's population of nearly two million. Every ethnic Albanian political party seeks independence for **Kosovo**. Even the establishment of a democratic government in Belgrade is unlikely to change the overwhelming desire of **Kosovo** Albanians for independence. The only realistic questions to resolve are the timing of **Kosovo's** independence and the conditions for achieving it. These conditions involve the interrelated problems of the preservation of **Kosovo's** multiethnic character and the establishment of democracy.

The **Kosovo** Albanians themselves are prepared to wait three to five years for independence. Their immediate focus is post-war reconstruction and democratic self governance as a UN protectorate enforced by NATO's KFOR troops. The **Kosovo** Liberation Army (KLA), reorganized into the civilian **Kosovo** Protection Corps, has worked hard to develop a close and constructive relationship with NATO. The Albanians realize that they can change their political relationship with Serbia, but not their geography. Survival in this hostile region will require NATO's continuing military support.

While the establishment of democracy in Serbia would generally stabilize the region, the Kosovo Albanians perceive it as a potential threat to their goal of independence. They fear that it would lead to international pressure for them to accept autonomy within Serbia or the FRY. Such external pressure could radicalize **Kosovo** Albanians, prompting them to accelerate their independence timetable and tempt them to use violence to achieve it. That scenario would strain relations with NATO and could distort **Kosovo's** democratization effort.

A more immediate problem is the violence by Kosovo Albanians against the **Kosovo** Serbs, Roma (also known as Gypsies), and other minorities. There has been a pattern of violence against these minorities aimed at driving them from **Kosovo**. It is likely that some elements of the KLA have been active in organizing the violence. Unless KFOR acts firmly to prevent further violence, **Kosovo** will become monoethnic.

This violence also jeopardizes **Kosovo's** fledgling democratization program. The success of **Kosovo** Albanian nationalist hardliners in forcefully driving Serbs from **Kosovo** is emboldening them to undermine the institutionalization of democracy and civil society. A democratic movement that does not recognize and protect the rights of its minorities cannot claim to be genuinely democratic.

An effective incentive for the **Kosovo** Albanians to secure minority rights as part of democratic development would be to link the guarantee of these rights to recognition of independence. Applying the concept of earned independence would help isolate hardliners and encourage the democratization process. Attaining independence could also be contingent upon the maintenance of good relationships with neighboring states. This condition would divert Kosovo Albanians from seeking to gather all ethnic Albanians in the Balkans into a single Albanian state, an outcome that would profoundly destabilize the region.

#### Tensions in Montenegro

If Milosevic provokes another conflict in the Balkans, it is likely to be with Montenegro. Federated with Serbia, Montenegro broke with Milosevic over two years ago to elect a multiethnic coalition that has moved the small republic of 650,000 people steadily toward democratization and independence. Support for independence from the federation has expanded since then. During the Kosovo war, the government of President Milo Djukanovic provided significant assistance to NATO and was given an implicit security guarantee by the alliance.

Montenegro established a measure of economic independence from Serbia last year by introducing the German **mark** as an alternative currency. This helped stem the slide of the Montenegrin economy. But the domestic political pressures on Djukanovic have not eased. Nearly 50 percent of the population supports independence, but Serbia, which maintains 14,000 federal troops in Montenegro, has infiltrated Montenegro with about 2,000 paramilitaries and threatens to annex the northern portion of Montenegro along the Serbian border or to oust Djukanovic by force.

The Serbian threat to destabilize Montenegro poses familiar security dilemmas for the United States. A Serbian-inspired coup against the democratically elected

Montenegrin government would revive concerns about NATO's ability to protect its friends and raise new questions about US leadership. US-led NATO intervention this year, however, would risk casualties no US political leader would want to assume responsibility for, especially during an election campaign.

To deter conflict, the United States would have to warn Milosevic that NATO would help Montenegro forcefully resist Serbian interference. For such a strategy to be credible, NATO would probably need to move appropriate military forces in the region. The United States should also stress that it would support any decision made democratically by the Montenegrins for either independence or greater autonomy within the FRY. This conflict is preventable only if the United States is prepared to apply the lessons of Bosnia and Kosovo by deterring conflict before it begins, and by backing that deterrent if Belgrade chose to test it.

#### Democratic Policies

The United States and Europe must work together to overcome the democratic deficit in the Balkans that has led to the rise of extreme nationalism, four wars, and humanitarian suffering in Europe unparalleled since the end of World War II. The experience of the past decade has demonstrated that Europe lacks the cohesion and resolve to deal with these problems on its own and that the instinct in the United States is to ignore problems until they become too bloody and dire.

Transatlantic cooperation has begun to produce dividends. The growing strength of democratic movements in Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia has produced leaders whom the Western democracies can work with in taming Serbian nationalism and ousting Milosevic. Once that is accomplished, no matter how long it takes, it will be possible to begin integrating Serbia into Europe, thus removing the primary cause of Balkan instability.