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Kosovo's Albanian leaders have declared independence from Serbia. But what has happened since?

Albanians in the province-turned-self-declared-state celebrated it, along with fellow ethnics in Europe and America. Serbs in Kosovo, on the other hand, have demonstrated against it, along with *their* fellow ethnics in Serbia, Bosnia and elsewhere. Both reactions were to be expected, just not some of the actions we've seen, such as the burning of other countries' embassies in Belgrade.

Many countries in Europe — read, in the European Union (EU) — were keen to recognise Kosovo's independence from Serbia, convinced that it is the best solution for the province, as does America. (The EU, of course, has recently sent in EULEX to help form a new legislative infrastructure in Kosovo.) Russia opposes it, convinced that it could set a dangerous precedent

for the rest of the world, and Spain within the EU opposes it, along with a few other EU countries, due to internal problems with separatists of their own.

Serbia doesn't want to recognise the self-declared republic of Kosovo; a large body of Serbs don't want to recognise it. And you know what? They don't have to. It's their right not to recognise it, just like it is the right of other countries like Albania and other private individuals around the world to do the opposite.

There are many problems with the unilateral declaration of independence, however peaceful and dignified the ceremony in Priština was. However, I want to share other reasons that I have never heard specifically mentioned by any one else. Maybe *alluded* to by others, but not explicitly and not with great focus.

But first of all, let me tell you what I think *isn't* the problem, or isn't *just* the problem. It's:

1. **NOT Koštunica**, and I have to say this, because there are people who are actually blaming him for the way Serbs in Kosovo and Belgrade have reacted to the declaration! At the recent rally in Belgrade, he gave a very patriotic, even nationalistic, speech against Kosovo's independence and separation from Serbia. But I can't take such an accusation seriously. You see, what these people are forgetting is that Vojislav Koštunica represents what many Serbs *already* think and feel about Kosovo and other issues *without* him having to mention anything openly. Those young men who attacked the embassies in Belgrade might have felt encouraged to do so by the rally, which was attended by hundreds of thousands of people, if not a million, and many famous people from Serbia and neighbouring countries spoke there — not just Koštunica. But Vojislav himself can't be held personally responsible for such vandalism. (By the way, I

means *without* either the consent of or based on any agreement with Belgrade), I can truly see how it is in no way the solution to the above-mentioned problems.

In my opinion, only one country can give the self-declared republic any legitimacy, and that's Serbia. Not America or the EU, and certainly not Albania or the Turkish Republic of Cyprus! It's Serbia's inherent right as a state to either accept or reject the secession of a region within its sovereign territory, without being pressured either way.

The only true solution to the Kosovo issue is not for Priština or Brussels to force Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade to accept the self-declared independence, or God forbid another war, but **inter-ethnic dialogue between the Serbian and Albanian people**, through which the two people can raise their concerns to one another in a civilised and *non*-abusive manner. Everything that could be helpful and prove beneficial for both peoples, will come from that.

Of course, it would be better if there were *NO* states on the planet and hence no borders. But even I acknowledge that we don't live in such a world.

We are dealing with people's emotions here, you know. I have seen so many times how national pride is something so strongly linked — *inextricably* so — to one's own sense of personal dignity. So let us bear that in mind when dealing with Kosovo and other issues throughout the war-torn Western Balkans, the former Yugoslavia.

ing “Kosova is free!”, and no longer consider their towns and villages to be part of Serbia (of course, they haven’t done so for a long time).

I saw the rally in Belgrade, Serbia, attended by hundreds of thousands of Serbs, maybe even a million, voicing loudly their great opposition to Kosovo independence. In Priština, Albanians were dancing and singing on the streets and scribbling on the newly erected “*New Born*” sculpture.

These two people just don’t talk to one another! And when they do, they’re just rude and abusive to one another, and such dialogue can never be described as “civilised”. Serbs relate the things they know, heard of, believe and feel about Kosovo, and are *bewildered* by what Albanians recount to them; and Albanians are likewise bewildered at what Serbs tell them, and share with them what *they* know, heard of, believe and feel. Rudeness, abuse, inconsideration and ignorance abound, and they are seen on and come from both sides. There is therefore a lack of *basic understanding* between the two, or like I mentioned above, lack of *inter-communal* understanding.

Kosovo Serbs don’t understand why Kosovo Albanians don’t feel safe under Belgrade and Serbia; while Kosovo Albanians, and perhaps other countries, don’t understand why Kosovo Serbs feel that only under Serbian sovereignty and Belgrade can they feel safe.

And yet, should you try to explain to the other side what they other side thinks, there is sheer *dismissal* from both sides; the other side is either deluded or just tells lies. No compassion and no understanding. Appalling.

So along with distrust, there is a lot of contempt as well: Albanians have a lot of contempt for Serbs, based on their own historical experience; and likewise, Serbs have contempt for Albanians, but not based on the same historical experience.

I’m not going to beat around the bush. I have never supported Kosovo independence before, and now that its Albanian leaders have declared it, not to mention unilaterally (which

don’t agree with many of Dr. Vojislav Koštunica’s views; some of them are just not impractical and thus, not helpful/beneficial for Serbia.) Also it’s

2. **NOT JUST Milošević**, who, as we know, caused a lot of the modern-day problems that the people of Kosovo face, both Serbian and Albanian though in different ways and for the other minorities. And of course,
3. **it’s NOT about “Greater Albania”**, even if some Albanians want it! (Actually, Kosovo Albanians prefer the independent state option and no doubt Albanians in Albania do as well, presumably seeing such a state as a “natural ally” in the region.)

This issue is, of course, a statist issue: specifically, a region within a state has declared independence from the mother state, which in turn doesn’t recognise its declaration nor its new-found existence. Being an anarchist, I don’t believe in the concept of states. In fact, because of what is happening with Kosovo, my belief in the anti-state principles of Anarchism is that much justified.

For me, the problems in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians, which I hardly hear *anyone* mention are these three things:

1. **Lack of TRUST;**
2. **Lack of INTER-ETHNIC DIALOGUE.** And hence,
3. **Lack of INTER-COMMUNAL UNDERSTANDING.**

Kosovo Albanians have wanted independence for a long time, and no doubt with even greater determination since the Kosovo war that ended almost ten years ago in 1999. Because of the recent events in history, and also before, they don’t want to be part of Serbia any more. Kosovo Albanians don’t trust Serbia, which is, considering the history, understandable. But

what doesn't seem to occur to many of them and even other people (!) — or at least *I* haven't seen that it substantially has — is that Kosovo Serbs don't trust *them*, i.e. Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo governmental institutions.

The distrust that Kosovo Serbs have for Kosovo Albanians has existed for a very long time. Even during Tito's Yugoslavia, there was, let's just say, nowhere near as much social cohesion — read, “Brotherhood & Unity” (*Bratstvo i Jedinstvo*) — between them as there was between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia, where there were plenty of mixed marriages.

And just to set the record straight, it wasn't Milošević who created this distrust that Kosovo Serbs feel for Kosovo Albanians; he infamously *utilised* it! (Remember “*Niko ne sme da vas bije*” and the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy? There you go.) And neither did Koštunica create it; he just doesn't have either the ability or the will or both of which to remedy such sentiment.

And so, Kosovo Albanians have declared independence for Kosovo without *truly* and *meaningfully* securing the trust of Kosovo Serbs. That is really amazing. I don't know whether they know how to encourage Kosovo Serbs to trust them or whether they even want to. But it's amazing how even now that Kosovo Albanians have declared independence, Kosovo Serbs still look to Belgrade. And although it is true that Dr. Vojislav Koštunica and others have discouraged Serbs in the region from participating in Kosovo institutions lest they tacitly recognise its independence and separation from Serbia, I repeat that *he* is NOT to blame for the distrust that Kosovo Serbs feel and *have felt* for a *very long time* for Kosovo Albanians and institutions run by them. Period.

And this is where the second problem I mentioned above has prolonged this problem.

A major problem that no-one seems to have considered (!) is the **utter lack of inter-ethnic dialogue between Serbs and Albanians**. Sure, Kosovo Albanian leaders and Serbian

leaders from Belgrade have done many rounds of negotiation regarding the future status of Kosovo over the past few years. It's good that there was even *that* kind of dialogue! But what about dialogue between ordinary Kosovo Serbs and Albanians, the civilian population? Hmm?

Even in Israel/Palestine, further southeast of the Balkans, there is some form of interethnic relations between Jews and Arabs in the heart of the Middle East, while virtually *nothing* — NOTHING — of the sort can be said for Serbs and Albanians in southern Europe! Indeed, for many Serbs and Albanians, Serbo-Albanian relations don't even exist.

And so I ask myself, are Serbs and Albanians not ashamed of themselves? Israelis and Palestinians who live on the *centuries* disputed Holy Land have better relations with one another than Serbs and Albanians who live in the heart of southeastern Europe! Israelis and Palestinians get on much better with one another than Serbs and Albanians!!!

Many Serbs view the Albanians of Kosovo as a *completely* “alien” group of people, no better than “interlopers”, even though the overwhelming majority of them have ancestors who lived in the region going back hundreds of years. On the other hand, Albanians look at Serbs from Kosovo as somehow *eternally* “influenced by Belgrade”, even when they are expressing deeply rooted fears that they have felt throughout their lives living there.

(Oh, it's easy to blame Serbian leaders from Belgrade for such sentiments Kosovo Serbs harbor! But actually, dear readers, such attitude is *highly* short-sighted and *grossly* ignorant.)

As you've seen on the news, Kosovo Serbs wave Serbian flags, proclaiming “Kosovo is Serbia!”, and most importantly, they *wholeheartedly* reject the independence of Kosovo that other countries perhaps blindly recognise, and make it clear that Kosovo is still territorially part of Serbia and that they recognise no separation from Serbia. Kosovo Albanians wave Albanian flags and flags of other countries, proudly proclaim-