

TABULA RASA

Kosovo is a partially recognized state and a disputed territory in Southeastern Europe. Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in February 2008, after years of strained relations between its Serb and mainly Albanian inhabitants. It has been recognized by the United States and major European Union countries, but Serbia, backed by its powerful ally Russia refuses to do so, as do most ethnic Serbs inside Kosovo.

After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Serbia responded to the separatist pressure from Kosovo by launching a brutal crackdown on the territory's Albanian population, which was only brought to an end by a military intervention by the NATO in 1999.

Until 2008 the UN administered the province. Reconciliation between the majority Albanians, most of who support independence, and the Serb minority remains elusive.

One of the major barriers to Kosovo's membership to the European Union is the intransigence of other European states. Five EU members still do not recognize Kosovo's independence: Greece, Slovakia, Cyprus and Romania show no sign of softening – and Spain's opposition has hardened thanks to recent events in Catalonia.

Full membership would also demand that Kosovo accede to various unwelcome demands from abroad. These include a new border demarcation with Montenegro, a normalization agreement with Serbia and, at the behest of Kosovo's five powerful Western sponsors – the so-called Quint – its co-operation with the Specialist Chambers established to investigate criminality perpetrated by the KLA during the conflict with Serbia.

It feels to many like Kosovo is being asked to jump through hoops just to facilitate the membership ambitions of its neighbors and the self-image of its external patrons. The fact that Kosovo is the only Western Balkan

nation whose citizens still require a visa to travel to the Schengen area is a particularly acute source of frustration.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia unilaterally and, as such, its independence has always been contentious. It is also hardly a model EU candidate state – it suffers from endemic corruption, cronyism and organized crime and, for all the emphasis on “multi-ethnicity” in the 2008 constitution, it remains sharply divided along ethnic lines. The education system is notably poor and, according to the World Bank, while Kosovo’s economic growth has outperformed its neighbors: “the current growth model relies heavily on remittances to fuel domestic consumption”.

Kosovo’s assorted problems are by no means unique. But even though Kosovo has been afforded an unparalleled degree of support by Western states – and indeed the EU – since Belgrade’s rule was suspended in mid-1999, it simply has not made the progress its external supporters promised.

Kosovo itself is not to blame for this. Its key sponsors – the very states who actively encouraged it to unilaterally declare independence – have for too long tolerated, and at times facilitated, the activities of a corrupt elite. They have periodically engaged in their own brand of mismanagement and corruption, and made promises they were in no position to keep.

Kosovo’s current predicament is therefore an indictment of the Western powers that have intervened to “help” it. And the costs of their failures are now being borne by Kosovars themselves.

TASK AT HAND

As the committee appointed by the parliament, you are required to prepare a presentation encompassing:

- Revival Plan for Kosovo.
- Strategies to enter the European Union.
- Phase Wise Action Plans.

