



KOSOVO

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EU struggles to help stabilize independent Kosovo

By Christophe Chatelot, Le Monde

http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2008/07/10/l-union-europeenne-peine-a-relever-le-defi-de-la-stabilisation-du-kosovo-independant_1068583_3214.html

Five months after the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo Albanians, on February 17th, the situation in this formerly Serbian province resembles every day more to a «frozen conflict», an embarrassment to the European Union which is trying to save the face of its foreign and security policy.

The issue of the forthcoming European Commission sponsored donors' conference for Kosovo, scheduled for July 11th, will probably confirm this fact, as did the difficulties regarding the European mission (EULEX), the most important one ever undertaken by the EU.

Kosovo Albanians expect, however, an awful lot from this conference, the second of the kind since the war against the Belgrade regime ended in June 1999. Priština has come out with a figure of 1,4 billions euros which it says it needs in order to help finance its programm of social-economic development in the three years to come (2009-2011).

« Kosovo has the biggest unemployment rate (officially 45%) in the region, the worst poverty rate (37% of a total of approximately two million people) and the weakest economy (4,4% growth rate in 2007 according to the FMI)", according to an official report of the Kosovo government.

Even though Economy minister Ahmet Shala estimates that the financial hopes of Priština are «realistic», compared to the 7,4 billions euros promised by donors to the Palestinians in December 2007, Brussels does not believe that more than one billion euros could be gathered from the participants (EU's 27 member, international financial institutions, UN agencies, USA, Norway, Switzerland, South Arabia, Canada).

«The Albanians run the risk of getting disappointed if they expect to receive a lot of cash», a Western diplomat said. «Some people think that Kosovo is a fathomless well», another diplomat explains. Since June 1999, aid granted to Kosovo has amounted to 2,7 billion euros, two thirds of which have been given by the EU or its member States.

Does this show a lack of interest for Kosovo? Except for Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, no other Head of State or Government, not even a single government minister, will take part in the conference chaired by EU enlargement commissioner. Potential



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donors such as Islamic Conference Organisation or Arab Ligue member countries - those that gave money out of their own pocket to help reconstruct Bosnia-Herzegovina after the 1992-1995 war - they will not be present. As a matter of fact, most of these countries have not recognized the independence of Kosovo, and part of EU members have not done that, either.

It is true that the region has not sunk into chaos since February 17th. But Kosovo is de facto divided into the North, turned towards Serbia, and the Albanian speaking South. The fragility of its security and institutional situation, as well as its uncertain international status (so far, only 43 countries have recognized its independence) can hardly tempt anyone to take chances.

This is proven by the difficulties encountered by EULEX, the European police and justice mission, essential for the rule of law in Kosovo, which is to replace the UN mission. EULEX is still being opposed by Serbia and Russia; the latter has just raised its voice at the United Nations on the issue. Russian UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin strongly reacted on Wednesday to EULEX chief, France's Yves de Kermabon's statement that the European mission was «totally different» from the UN mission, deployed in Kosovo since 1999. Remarks as this may well break the legal illusion which is necessary if Serbia and Moscow are to let the UN transfer its most important prerogatives to the EU. That transfer has not yet started on the field because there is no agreement on immunities to be granted by the UN to EULEX members.