



KOSOVO

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Failing to start the blue car in Kosovo

By Patrick Jackson, BBC

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Since the EU launched its flagship Rule of Law mission (Eulex) in Kosovo in mid-February, its leader has not visited the Serb north.

Opposition to the Kosovo Albanians' declaration of independence from Serbia is intense there - and Eulex is seen as a pillar of support for the new state.

But hostility on the ground is not the only problem dogging the EU's most ambitious security and defence project to date.

More than a month after they were due to take over from UN counterparts, no EU police, justice or customs officials are in the field, mentoring Kosovan colleagues.

Only about 300 of the expected 1,900 members of the Eulex mission are deployed, mostly in a logistical role - and the reason for this is the lack of a legal "umbrella".

The umbrella was meant to be the adoption by the UN of the plan for supervised independence of Kosovo put forward by the Finnish negotiator Martti Ahtisaari. The EU would have assumed the supervising role, taking over from the UN, which has administered the province since the end of the war in 1999.

But Russia objected, and this plan fell through.

Two-track 'trap'

Now UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon is trying instead to "reconfigure" the UN mission in Kosovo (Unmik) so that Eulex can operate under UN authority, but it is still unclear whether this will work.

Unmik would like to see the process completed by late October. But privately, diplomats in Pristina can see the process being dragged out much longer.

One option that Eulex chief Yves de Kermabon is keen to rule out, even as a temporary measure, is a two-track mission whereby Unmik would monitor the Serb north and other non-Albanian areas, and Eulex, the rest of Kosovo.

"We must do our best to avoid this trap," says the former French general who commanded Nato K-For troops in the aftermath of the March 2004 anti-Serb riots - the last big wave of ethnic violence.



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Alex Anderson, project director of the independent International Crisis Group in Pristina, believes Eulex is reluctant to deploy because they "fear becoming manoeuvred into becoming a mission for the Albanians with a fig leaf UN presence in the Serb areas".

He also predicts a "very big credibility problem" for the EU among Albanians if Eulex is unable to operate in Serb areas.

Kosovan Deputy Prime Minister Rame Manaj says his government has done its best to prepare for the transition.

"If I were to use the word frustration, I would use it in relation to the activities of Unmik, namely its lack of action," he adds.

'Power of advice'

Pristina's Blue Building, a glass cube on a hill above the Kosovan capital with a few of the EU's dark-blue staff cars parked outside, is the hub of EU operations in Kosovo.

Asked what the EU has achieved there to date, spokesman Andy McGuffie points to its pre-independence work to reform essential services, from telecoms to mining.

This work will continue. EU states pledged two-thirds of the 1.2bn euros raised for Kosovo at this month's donors' conference in Brussels.

But another central part of the EU project is effectively grounded for the same reason as Eulex.

Mr McGuffie's boss, Pieter Feith, is both the EU Special Representative (EUSR) and the International Civilian Representative (ICR).

He would be the man supervising Kosovo's independence, if the Ahtisaari Plan came into effect.

He would have the power to intervene should the Kosovan authorities breach its provisions, including the power to sack public officials and overturn laws.

Mr Feith was appointed to the post in February by a group of EU and other states which back Kosovan independence and see the Ahtisaari Plan as the way forward.

Given that the UN Security Council, where Russia holds the power of veto, has not endorsed the plan, I asked what authority Mr Feith has today in Kosovo as ICR.

"In the first instance, it is the power of good advice," Mr McGuffie replied.



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He has, Mr McGuffie explained, been working steadily as ICR to advise the Kosovan government, and as EUSR to promote an EU future for Kosovo.

Sense of drift

Back in February, Alex Anderson points out, Brussels was clearly taking bold strides, with the pro-independence majority of EU states outweighing the sceptics.

"Today the dynamic seems to have gone a little into reverse and the EU appears to have lost its focus on Kosovo," he says.

"With Eulex looking a little like a phantom at the moment, there is a sense of inertia.

"The ball is drifting back into the court of the UN, a fundamentally neutral organisation."

Behind the scenes in pro-independence EU circles, the irritation at the intransigence of Serbia and its ally Russia is palpable.

"Serbia has to consider the wisdom of pursuing EU membership and opposing the biggest EU security and defence policy deployment to date," one senior international diplomat said in Pristina, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The main hope for the EU is that the new pro-Western Serbian government, which has demonstrated its determination to make fast progress towards EU membership with the arrest of Radovan Karadzic, does indeed soften its position.

Otherwise it could remain grounded in Kosovo for a long time.