



# KOSOVO

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## Many Kosovo citizens gloomy about 2009

By Besa Beqiri, Southeast European Times

[http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/articles/2009/01/05/reportage-01](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/articles/2009/01/05/reportage-01)

By all rights, 2008 should have been a glorious year for Kosovo. The new country can list a number of triumphs: independence on February 17th, a new constitution and recognition of the fledgling state by more than 50 countries, including major powers.

Yet enthusiasm for the new year is lacking. Kosovo institutions still do not have access to the north; the UN's six-point plan (widely considered a capitulation to Belgrade) lurks in the shadows of policy; EULEX still needs time to consolidate itself; UNMIK lingers months after Kosovo expected it to disappear; and Serbia is relentlessly testing Kosovo Albanian nerves by operating an express train to Kosovo that does not stop at the border and sending officials on high-level visits.

Diplomatic and geopolitical frustrations aside, ordinary Kosovo citizens are struggling with economic concerns such as the unemployment rate. They also complain the cost of living keeps rising, while their salaries steadily fall behind. On the street, while disquiet is widely shared, different opinions exist on the most serious challenge.

Majlinda Tyrbetari from Pristina says organised crime, corruption, the disbanding of the Kosovo Protection Corps and deficiencies in healthcare are major problems for Kosovo. For her, fighting organised crime must come first, though it is something that both local and international organisations cannot readily handle.

Amor Koshi from Gjakova worries most about the security of the Kosovo border and organised crime. He sees Serbia as a threat to national security.

Ylber Morina from Pristina agrees there is "a possible threat" from Serbia trying "to get into Kosovo". He thinks Kosovo, in the next few months, will have to address the continuing difficulty of privatising state-owned enterprises in its Serb-dominated areas. It also faces an overall socio-economic "crisis", in his opinion.

"If Kosovo authorities attempt to extend their authority in the north, this would cause the rebellion of the Serbs, and it would definitely destabilise Kosovo," Pjeter Ndou from Gjakova says.

Sevdije Rushiti from Mitrovica has another point of view. She thinks most about the economic situation, energy shortages and the possibility of EULEX's failure.



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"The difficult economic situation is the most dangerous problem -- unemployment, high prices, and low salaries; all these can cause real disappointment among citizens, which would lead to strikes and social unrest. Plus, corruption is more widespread when unemployment is at its current level," she says.

Rame Salihu, a taxi driver from a Pristina-area village, considers the economy the leading problem, followed by integration of the Serb minority.

Iliriana Loshi of Pristina focuses on EULEX and its relations with Kosovo institutions. Among other challenges, she lists electricity blackouts and her expectation that few additional countries will recognise Kosovo in the coming months, weakening the sense of diplomatic momentum it enjoyed for much of 2008.

Some analysts go so far as to say that there has been no essential change in Kosovo since its declaration of independence. "Kosovo is not a state. I would say there has been no essential [progress] since the declaration of independence; on the contrary, there has been backsliding," Avni Zogiani from the NGO Cohu told a TV show called *A Voice for You*.

Cohu was part of the NGO network that organised the December demonstrations in Pristina against the UN's six-point plan.

Kosovo analyst Belul Beqaj says the government will spend the next three months trying to convince the citizens of Kosovo that nobody will implement the widely hated UN plan. "Personally, I don't expect people in power to object to the six points, but as a consequence of that hypocrisy, tensions will soar and citizens' disappointment ... will grow rapidly," Beqaj says.

He says the new state's alleged dysfunction and the mounting disappointment of the citizenry, "which will be used at a certain moment as a detonator for the radicalisation of demands", could lead to calls for early elections or to the arousal of ethnic antagonism.

"The first month of spring is traditionally the month for a critical mass to explode," Beqaj warns.

But Ulpiana Lama, a professor in Pristina who also hosts the TV show "A Voice for You", clings to a glimmer of optimism. "It is realistic to expect that the recognition of Kosovo independence will accelerate in the second half of the next year. This means the period of time [up till then] should be considered an investment on the part of Kosovo," she contends.



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Lama sees 2009 as fraught with three challenges: the economic crisis, which according to her will be more visible in the second half of next year; "the continual provocations and tests of Kosovo's sovereignty by Serbia" and "the pressure coming from the opposition to hold elections".

That said, there could be more risks to come.

From the Kosovo point of view, the global community has been overly hospitable to Belgrade's demands while losing sight of the majority in Kosovo. A perception of international indifference could endanger not only international efforts in the fledgling state but also its local institutions, which lack the strength to face numerous challenges at once.