



KOSOVO

COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

October 30

In Kosovo, UN in Dirty Coal and Business, Ridge in Albania

By Matthew Russell Lee, Inner City Press

<http://www.innercitypress.com/ridgeschook102807.html>

UNITED NATIONS - The UN's administration of Kosovo has been fraught with controversy, from mis-management of the Pristina airport to the shooting death of protesters by Romanian peacekeepers using 13-year old rubber bullets. Thus, when the UN's second in command, vice-vicey Steven Schook, preemptively announced on September 26 that he is under investigation by the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services, there was some "we-told-you-so" from the local press, and a refusal to comment by the wider UN system. Schook said "the probe pertains to my alleged aggressive behavior, unprofessional and close relationships with Energy Minister Ethem Ceku... and extends to personal relationships I supposedly had with some women from Kosovo." Inner City Press that same day asked UN spokesperson Michele Montas, and again on October 18, but received no explanation. Lead UN envoy Joaquim Rucker, asked by Inner City Press at a stakeout interview by the Security Council on October 9, also declined to explain. Video here. Inner City Press has continued to inquire, leading to this first in a series:

Schook's power in Kosovo involves licensing and privatization of resources. Even as Kosovo's status is pending in the UN Security Council and revolving talks, power plants are planned and for sale. The burning of dirty coal, lignite, is envisioned. The Schook-favored bidders, in a process to be finalized by the end of 2007, include Czech company CEZ (sometimes called CHEZ) and the American AES, which involves former U.S. Kosovo verification envoy William Walker. Personal connections are what get these contracts: the Czech company, incorporating as "New Kosovo Energy L.L.C.," hired Ceku's former secretary Ekrem Belegu, from Peja.

Schook on September 26 said he was being investigated for "supporting Project C as a key to the future economic prosperity of Kosova and as a part of that supporting everyone in the Project Steering Committee including its chairman Minister for Energy and Mines Ethem Ceku" and for "personal relationships."

The juicy allegations involve Kosovar singers Nora Istrefi and Jehona Sopi -- Schook is said to have a weakness in this regard -- and their relation to the privatizations. Supposedly this is all going to be overseen by the accounting firm PCW, whose "fees will be paid out of a \$10.5 million Lignite Power Technical Assistance Project grant from the World Bank." (Power, Risk and Finance, July 20, 2007).



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Albanian Ridge

The trend of Washington-decided grants to U.S.-based consultants for work in the Balkans extends to Tom Ridge's firm, Ridge Global LLC, and its lobbying work for Albania, which is understood to be funded by USAID. A press release on October 1, 2007, announcing Ridge Global's creation stated

"Though publicly launched today, Ridge Global already has attracted a diverse array of clients, including the government of Albania, which has enlisted Ridge Global to help the Adriatic democracy meet its goal to join NATO in 2008. Additionally, the Ridge team assists Albania in attracting private enterprise and creating a roadmap for political and justice reforms. 'Given an extraordinary depth of expertise, Tom Ridge is a leading statesman and participant on the world stage,' said Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha. 'We value his forward-leaning wisdom and input.'"

Prior to formalizing his company, Ridge was hired personally to work for Albania in September 2006, triggering praise by Ridge for Berisha. On September 7, 2006, State Department spokesman Scott McCormack was asked

QUESTION: On Albania. Mr. McCormack, Tom Ridge, the former U.S. Homeland Security chief used to work as a consultant to the Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha on security and NATO issues. Mr. Ridge said today that Mr. Berisha is a very passionate and compelling individual with a great vision for Albania and the entire Balkans. Any comment?

MR. MCCORMACK: Former Secretary Ridge is a private citizen.

QUESTION: But it's -- but it's private citizen, I agree, but I was told that Mr. Ridge prior to the acceptance has full consultation with a DOS official and I'm wondering how this trilateral connection Tom Ridge, Sali Berisha, Department of State was cooperating in this --

MR. MCCORMACK: Former senior officials are very often in contact with the State Department, especially when they have contacts with foreign officials. We certainly do everything that we can to give them the most up-to-date information we have about our policies, but that is typically where it ends.

The work surfaced again on June 8, 2007, when State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey was questioned about Ridge's role in Bush's trip to Tirana:

QUESTION: What role did Tom Ridge, who's stationed (inaudible) in Albania play in arranging the visit by President Bush to Albania? Did he consult with the Department of State or did (inaudible) --

MR. CASEY: I'm sorry, did --



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QUESTION: -- with the Department of Justice for his representation of Albanian interest in this time?

MR. CASEY: I'm sorry, Mr. Lambros, did who arrange the visit? The visit was arranged by --

QUESTION: Tom Ridge, Tom Ridge. He's stationed in Albania and was going to be (inaudible) Department of State.

MR. CASEY: He's stationed in Albania as what? He's stationed in Albania as what?

QUESTION: Excuse me?

MR. CASEY: He's stationed in --

QUESTION: In Albania, yes, correct.

MR. CASEY: As what?

QUESTION: As PR man, as -- I think.

MR. CASEY: I have no idea what Mr. Ridge is doing. I have no idea whether he's in Albania or not. I do know that we have strong relations with our good friend and ally, Albania, and that the visit of the President of the United States represents that; and you can talk to the White House in terms of the greater specifics of it. But last time I looked, you know, PR companies aren't the representatives of sovereign governments either in the United States or Albania or any other place.

But in the Balkans, particularly in Kosovo, anything is possible. Developing.