



KOSOVO

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No triumph in Kosovo until Serbs return

By Harry de Quetteville, Daily Telegraph

<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/foreign/harrydequetteville/feb08/kosovo-serbs.htm>

It's always easy to spot anything Serb - house, church, monastery - in Kosovo. That's because it's inevitably ringed with razor wire, and is usually guarded by bored looking KFOR troops.

They're not always bored though, because very occasionally a rocket or grenade is lobbed in the direction of whatever they are protecting. Today Kosovo declares independence as a multi-ethnic state. Its constitution has lots of noble language about equal rights, and lists Albanian and Serbian as its two official languages. But that is a sham.

This weekend I went wandering in the pristine snow that has fallen across Kosovo to the town of Prizren. Its tiny pre-99 war Serb population has disappeared entirely. The Orthodox church, on the hill overlooking the town, is behind a NATO sign which warns off vandals with the message: "Danger - authorised use of weapons".

Serb houses, often still with charred timbers or caved in roofs, most covered in graffiti, lie rotting behind razor wire, in the hope that one day their former residents will return to make good the damage.

Kosovo's prime minister Hashim Thaci has invited them so to do, but frankly, I'll believe it when I see it. And while for most residents of this newborn Balkan state the most important measures of its success will ultimately be economic - wages, jobs, investment - the international community must be judged by higher standards.

Its intervention in Kosovo was made on moral grounds, and morality dictates that the Kosovo project cannot be deemed a real triumph until the razor wire comes down and Serbs are able to return to their homes, wander freely beyond the confines of their enclaves and worship safely in their churches.

Only then can the NATO bombing raids of 1999 and the long diplomatic support for Kosovo's independence in the halls of London, Brussels and Washington, be truly justified.