

Explosive Legacy of The 1990s Balkan Wars

by Elke Fimmen

The death of Slobodan Milosevic occurred on the same day that Agim Ceku was elected Prime Minister of Kosovo. Ceku having been the commander on the Kosovo-Albanian side during Madeleine Albright's unnecessary Wellsian war against Yugoslavia in 1999, the timing smacks of something more than coincidence.

Trained in the Croatian military by U.S. advisors, for operations at the end of Serbia's war with Bosnia and Croatia in 1995, Ceku ended his service in Croatia as a brigadier-general in February 1999, then moving to the Kosovo Liberation Army. After commanding the KLA during the NATO war against Yugoslavia in 1999, Ceku was in charge of its demilitarization. Since then he has commanded the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). Ceku's job in 1999 was to reorganize the KLA into a proper military structure, which then cooperated closely with the NATO forces, providing intelligence for bomb targetting, among other services.

Until the death of Milosevic, the Serbian government was very reluctant to comment on Ceku's new designation, but this posture may now change. For some years, Serbia has been accusing Ceku of committing genocide against Serbs in Kosovo, during the 1990s fighting. There is no Hague indictment against him, unlike his predecessor, Ramush Haradinaj. The latter was released from The Hague, and is being allowed to await his trial (slated for this Summer) as a free man in Kosovo, a favor not granted to Serbs going on trial for genocide.

Elements of Tension

Kosovo is thus, once again, a current crisis point in the Balkans. But it is not the only one. A survey of the elements of tension around the Balkans, existing even prior to the death of Milosevic, reveals that the area is a basket of complicated issues, left over from more than a decade of geopolitical wars, shifting alliances, and other political games.

Each of these situations might be solved only through highly sensitive diplomacy, and, most of all, only under the condition that real economic development is the pathway of the future for all of those involved. At present, however, the region is in shambles. Kosovo, the rest of Serbia, and Bosnia are the worst off economically.

After the fall of communism in 1989, this region should have become one of the major area of development, defined by its bridge-function to the Near East, and by the major European waterway of the Danube—as the LaRouche movement developed it in the 1990 Productive Triangle program. Towards the end of the 1999 phase of Balkans warfare, Lyndon LaRouche updated this approach in a major article on the principles of physical economy of a Marshall Plan for the Balkans.

Instead came the geopolitical wars of the 1990s—unnecessary for any purpose other than to wreck the prospects for, first, all-European cooperation after the fall of communism, and, in the second phase, the Eurasian Triangle of Russia-India-China, and its potential cooperation with the U.S.A. and Europe for a new world economic architecture. Now, a new geopolitical game is being unleashed, again with major potential repercussions for world peace.

Kosovo status discussions have been going on for several weeks, after the death of former President Ibrahim Rugova in January. They are to determine, this year, whether Kosovo will be independent from Serbia, or remain a province with a high degree of autonomy, decentralization of administration, and guaranteed minority rights. European governments have generally favored the latter option, but this month at an EU foreign ministers meeting in Salzburg, British Foreign Minister Jack Straw commented provocatively to the effect, that independence of Kosovo is bound to come. South Eastern European Stability Pact coordinator, Erhard Busek, criticized Straw for damaging the diplomatic process.

Montenegro's independence referendum is scheduled for May. A republic within former Yugoslavia, Montenegro still forms one state, together with Serbia. The vote is expected to be very close. If the separation were to happen, Serbia would have no outlet to the Mediterranean Sea. If it lost both Kosovo and Montenegro, Serbia would be reduced to a landlocked rump of its former existence.

Reorganization of Bosnia-Herzegovina's structure is also to occur in 2006. Changes in this complicated construct are designed to dissolve the institutions of the Republika Srpska (Serb enclave) within Bosnia-Herzegovina, to create a single integrated state, but with decentralization at the local level. The Dayton Treaty of 1995 created three nominally independent entities (Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian), and thus a major impediment for economic reconstruction. The Croatian and Bosnian units joined in a federation; finishing the reorganization of Bosnia-Herzegovina may be long overdue, but, coming now, will add pressure to an already volatile situation.

Yugoslavia is to go on trial for genocide and aggression in a case brought by Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992-93 at the International Court of Justice (not The Hague Tribunal dealing with war crimes). Thirteen years later, the case is under deliberation. It is a complicated case, involving international law, which could potentially set a precedent regarding aggression against countries (including Iraq). At its initiation, the case was intended by the Bosnian government as a way to stop the war against Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had declared independence from Yugoslavia (today, Serbia-Montenegro); this independence had been recognized by NATO members, but Bosnia-Herzegovina was still under a weapons embargo and was officially not allowed to defend itself. Today, the case is seen by the Bosnians as a negotiating chip toward the government in Belgrade, to agree to the above-mentioned reorganization of Bosnia.

Greater Albania tendencies could be unleashed by an adverse outcome of the Kosovo status talks. Macedonia, another now independent former republic of Yugoslavia, has a large Albanian minority. So does Bulgaria. And Albania itself will react in one way or another. The potential remains for conflicting, intractable nationalist agendas to be activated here, as happened during the Balkan wars at the beginning of the 20th Century.