

**WALL STREET JOURNAL: COMPLETING KOSOVO<sup>©</sup>**  
**Dr Dimitrij Rupel, Ljubljana**

---

The recent indictment and surrender of former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj casts a new shadow over the fragile Balkan stability. There were fears that Mr. Haradinaj's indictment would set off new violence in Kosovo--even attacks against the international personnel present in the area, which, if unchecked, could spread to neighboring Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and, not least, Bosnia.

For the time being, the situation looks to be under control. In fact, given Mr. Haradinaj's extradition to The Hague and a change in government in Pristina, it is high time to bring Belgrade and Pristina back to the negotiating table. Kosovo's final status can be resolved in a stable manner only if the result is sanctioned by both capitals.

The international community has everything to gain from insisting on Kosovo's full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and we should work to conclude this process sooner than later. Cooperation with the tribunal is a standard all Balkan states must fulfill, and Mr. Haradinaj's commitment to cooperate fully is in many respects crucial to Kosovo's future status, which remains in flux.

The situation on the ground is truly complex. Unemployment in Kosovo hovers around 60%, depending on which statistical office is reporting. The youth are desperate and unenthusiastic about the future. The production sector remains almost totally inactive. Kosovo is supported by international aid and diaspora money on the one hand, and an unregistered service industry and organized crime on the other.

In light of this, some second thoughts about Kosovo's viability as an independent state are justified. But viability will not come from postponing final-status negotiations. Rather, we should work toward establishing ownership over the process, which seems impossible as long as Kosovo's future remains unidentified.

Kosovo represents not only a major economic challenge but a serious demographic and security challenge for the region. I am not sure it is advantageous for Belgrade to assume this burden, particularly if the future of both Serbia and Kosovo is inside the European Union. Serbia's road to EU membership would probably be less bumpy without Kosovo there to break the process.

The EU has in principle agreed on three premises relating to Kosovo's final status, namely that Kosovo will not return to pre-1999 status, that there will be no partition of Kosovo, and that there will be no joining with the Albanian populations in neighboring states.

It is my understanding that many in the EU and in Washington are now discussing ways to bring about a final-status solution. As we deliberate the framework in which to discuss Kosovo's final status, we must not lose ourselves in petty details, nor can we overlap each other. But we should keep in mind that time is running out. A forward-looking common EU-U.S. position on Kosovo's future would help to cool the temperature on the ground, as well as set the benchmark for final-status negotiations. In consultations with Washington, the EU's list of conditions pertaining to Kosovo's final status could perhaps be expanded to include an agreement among Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia on the protection of minorities, and an agreement on protecting religious and cultural identity of Serbs in Kosovo.

The bottom line is that Kosovo will be an unaccomplished society unless it manages to integrate and protect its Serb minority. Some progress has been made in this direction, but more remains to be done. During my recent visit to Washington, it was mentioned that Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs know less about each other than the Palestinians and the Israelis. This is bad news.

Success in final-status negotiations depends on whether we succeed in building cross-ethnic trust in Kosovo and in strengthening the confidence between Belgrade and Pristina.

*Dr Dimitrij Rupel is foreign minister of Slovenia and Chairman-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.*