

Challenges of the Peace Process in the South of Serbia⁴²

Dušan Janjić

1. Origins and Development of the Crisis

The South of Serbia, or Preševo Valley, as Albanians call this part of Serbia, consists of the Serbian municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja, all of which border on Kosovo. This area is important for Serbia because major railroads and highways run through it, connecting the Southern and central parts of Serbia with Kosovo. The transportation arteries in this area also connect Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece. Thus, it is through this area that Central Europe is linked with the Mediterranean. Around 70,000 Albanians live in the area.

Table 1: Ethnic Structure of the Population of Preševo Valley

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Preševo</i>	<i>Bujanovac</i>	<i>Medvedja</i>	TOTAL
Area (km ²)	264	461	524	1,249
Total population	38,943	49,238	13,368	101,549
No. of Serbs	3,206	14,660	9,205	27,071
Serbs %	8	30	70	36
No. of Albanians	34,992	29,588	3,892	68,472
Albanians %	90	60	28	59.3
No. of Others	745	4,990	331	6,066
Others %	2	10	2	4.7

⁴² Parts of this analysis were already published in 2004 in the study “From Conflict to Multiethnic Coexistence: The Program of Crisis Solution in the Presevo Valley”, which was part of an Open Society Institute project by the Soros Foundation (note of the editors).

Many Albanians consider the Preševo Valley to be “Eastern Kosovo.” Albanians from these municipalities declared themselves, in the referendum of 1992, in favour of “peaceful annexation” to their compatriots in Kosovo.

This view has been presented in a document of the Albanian Academy of Sciences and Arts from Tirana, according to which Daradnije, that is Eastern Kosovo, should be united into an independent State together with Kosovo. According to this view, this is a part of a comprehensive resolution of the Albanian question, also including the special status for Albanians in Montenegro (the area of Malesija with the municipalities of Rožaje, Plav, Gusinje, and Ulcinj plus Tuzi, which should be taken out of Podgorica and established as a separate municipality) and the status of constitutional people for Albanians in Macedonia—the Albanian Ilirida (Arvanitis, 2002:59).

The issues that drove Preševo Valley to a crisis situation include local Albanians’ needs for improved human rights and the Republic of Serbia’s need to protect and control a sensitive border. This conflict clearly has a multiethnic dimension: Albanians, who are a minority in Serbia overall but a majority in the Preševo Valley are at odds with a Serbian population that is a minority locally but a majority in the country – and is backed by Governmental authority. The Preševo Valley crisis is made especially acute by its close ties to the situations in Kosovo and Macedonia.

The crisis that has threatened the stability of Preševo Valley was coming on for the last 10 years of the 20th century. Under the rule of Milošević, Yugoslavia pursued a policy of systematic exclusion of Albanians from the educational system, political and public life, the State economy, etc. During 1998 and 1999, armed conflict in Kosovo – and the expulsion of Albanians from the Preševo Valley to Kosovo, where many joined the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) – created conditions that were ripe for armed conflict there. The establishment of the Ground Security Zone (GSZ) also tended to favour conflict here.

The GSZ was established under the military-technical agreement of Kumanovo on June 9, 1999. It is a five-kilometre-wide strip along the Serbian border with Kosovo. The total length of this strip is 402 km, out of which 139 are in the Preševo Valley. The population of the Preševo Valley section of the GSZ is 22,000, only 20 per cent of whom are Serbs. The GSZ was established as a separation zone between the Army of Yugoslavia and KFOR. The Army of Yugoslavia is prohibited access to this strip, while members of Yugoslavia's Ministry for Internal Affairs are only allowed to carry firearms of "a calibre below 12mm" inside the GSZ.

Early in 2000, certain pro-Albanian forces interested in changing the border in this region assumed that the "right time" had come. After the Army of Yugoslavia and Republic of Serbia police were withdrawn from Kosovo, the State border with Albania and part of the border with Macedonia, there was "uncontrolled entry of refugees, terrorists, criminals, and foreign citizens" into Kosovo, mostly from Albania, according to the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia. And, "due to a tolerant attitude of KFOR towards Albanian terrorists", there was a "transfer of terrorism" from Kosovo to the Preševo Valley area. According to KFOR commander Lt. Gen. Carlo Cabigiozo, and most other observers, extremist armed groups in the South of Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo are mutually interconnected. By prohibiting military presence from the territory of the GSZ, the international community created a power vacuum, within which extremist Albanians formed armed units – under the umbrella of the LAPMB. In the period from June 21, 1999 to November 21, 2000, there were in this area, according to estimates of Belgrade authorities, 296 terrorist attacks and raids in which 11 persons were killed (five police officers and six civilians), 38 were wounded (33 police officers, three civilians and two members of the UN mission), and two citizens were kidnapped. In addition, State and private property was destroyed. However, on Nov. 21, 2000, armed activities expanded. At that time, larger groups of Albanians attacked police positions. Even artillery was used in these attacks. That is what helped Albanians to occupy villages (Dobrošin, Lučani, Končulj, and Mali Trnovac) in the municipality of

Bujanovac. (Information on the Security Situation, 2001. Section 2, p. 3).

The most active representatives of the Albanians included political parties and extremist groups organized as the Liberation Army of Preševo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac (LAPMB). Establishment of the LAPMB was a strategically motivated transfer of activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army to a new territory. LAPMB is, in fact, a loose confederation of different groups, i.e. of two political parties and three armed groups. It is not an army as it lacks a joint organization, command, and awareness of belonging to an army structure. (International Crisis Group (ICG) (2001) *After Milosevic: A Practical Agenda for a Lasting Balkans Peace*, International Crisis Group, Brussels. p. 40). These militant groups, who had the support of the Albanian political parties from Kosovo, represented one of the main obstacles to peace in the Preševo Valley. These parties organized, in the course of 2000, numerous public panels and discussions on the topic of "The Future of Eastern Kosovo." This topic is also a component part of the pre-election campaign for local elections in Kosovo, and it is expected to be reactivated in the campaign for Kosovo's November elections.

Estimates of the number of these people differ: Albanian political leaders mention the figure of around 400-500, while the LAPMB sources say that there are more than 1500. The LAPMB core consists of Albanians from these municipalities who fought in the ranks of the KLA, but the group also includes numerous Albanian highlanders, coming from Kosovo and northern Albania across the Kosovo border. The objective of the LAPMB is the "liberation" of Preševo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac. The basic idea is to provoke a repressive response on the part of the Government, followed by bloodshed and mass exile, in the hopes that such a situation would cause NATO to intervene here, as it did in Kosovo.

After Milošević's fall, and the establishment of democracy in Serbia in 2001, the republic was faced with a new reality. Some of the basic factors causing instability in the republic include: the financial and

technological backwardness of the economy; the implosion of the institutional system due to inefficient and corrupt State institutions; tense interethnic relations, including the temporarily subdued Serbian-Albanian relations and the potentially escalating problem of Serbian relations with Sandzaks and Bosnjaks; the threat to Serbia's territorial integrity caused by the likely eventual secession of Kosovo – as well as the tensions in Preševo Valley, which seem to have cooled somewhat for the time being.

The international community and KFOR in particular had a role in creation of Preševo Valley crisis. For example, in March 2000, that KFOR was not controlling the GSZ was public knowledge, which helped setting up a LAPBM base with 100 to 2000 persons in the village of Dobrošin, whose task was to recruit others.

Albanian extremists used GSZ as a buffer zone in which they developed their own activities (ICG, 2001:39). *The Coordinating Body* tried from its establishment until January 21, 2001, to narrow the area for enlargement of LAPBM by coordinated police actions. Only after a couple of months of low-intensity war, it was noticed that armed extremists were a direct challenge to the responsibility and security of KFOR. Namely, at the beginning of hostilities NATO strived to stop them. In February 2001, NATO started to exert pressure on armed Albanians in the Preševo Valley to put an end to attacks, and pressed Belgrade to cooperate with KFOR. That was also confirmed at the ministerial meeting of NATO when it was decided not to tolerate further violence in the GSZ. At the same time, the American Secretary of State, Collin Powell, Stated that American forces in KFOR would participate in all NATO and KFOR actions for elimination of violence in the South of Serbia and in Kosovo, even if it involved the confrontation against hostile moves and attacks of Albanian extremists.

The problem of the Preševo Valley, by its dimensions, is a small one, but it is also a dangerous one. This part of Republic of Serbia is extremely underdeveloped and lagging behind the rest of the country. In the former Yugoslavia, this was just one of several underdeveloped areas, with enough opportunities for Albanians who lived there to work and study

free of charge in the neighbouring Macedonia and Kosovo (Prishtina and Skopje). Serbs from the South of Serbia looked for their future mainly in Belgrade. When the country fell apart, this became a border area. Economic devastation created more unemployed people who started looking for their future outside the Serbian borders, or turned to grey economy and illegal business.

According to the 2002 census results, over 30,000 citizens left this area in the last decade. It is believed that this number is double in reality. Only in the last two years, several thousands of young and educated people moved out. Whole families are moving out towards Niš and Belgrade (Serbs), and Skopje, Prishtina, the USA, Canada and Australia (Albanians).

The main reason for moving out is not interethnic intolerance, but rather poverty. The GDP in the South of Serbia is 52% below the rest of the country.

After several decades of flourishing, the economy of Vranje, which was one of the most developed municipalities and a role model to Bujanovac and Preševo, started to record permanent losses. Large companies – “Jumko”, “Simpo” and “Kostana” – went bankrupt, like most family businesses. The dimension of economic collapse in the second most developed town of Leskovac (mainly engaged in textile and metal industries) is expressed by the fact that nothing was built in this town for more than ten years. In the municipalities of Medvedja, Bujanovac and Preševo, only a few new apartment buildings were built in the same period.

Serious economic and social problems are fertile soil for political instability and dissatisfaction among citizens. The problem of underdevelopment will certainly burden this part of Serbia in the coming decades, but the risks can be partly reduced by providing large investment programs from the State funds and cheap loans.

The second group of problems is security of people and interethnic relations. This problem has two main forms: first, marginalization and

self-isolation of Albanian minority who expresses their loyalty to Albanian movement and ethnic disparity between communities. Applying the measures of minority democratic policy and integration of Albanians in the political institutions and political and public life of Serbia can in principle solve this crisis.

The problem in the South of Serbia is dangerous from the security point because it is a part of the “instability ring” with Kosovo and Macedonia. Many Albanians view this part of Serbia as “Eastern Kosovo”, thus proving that Pan-Albanian Movement is strong. The risk is even bigger considering that this territory is an important route for illegal trade and smuggling of drugs. This part of Serbia is a “hot spot” of Serbia in terms of organized crime and “transmission of terrorism”.

The dimension of security risks for Serbia and Kosovo and Macedonia became clear during the conflicts in 2000 and 2001, which showed that Albanian extremists have the capacity to spread armed conflicts and riots from one territory to another, and use the violence to achieve their goals. Serbia as a State, its military forces, police and media also have the capacity to transmit conflict to Macedonia. It can be assumed that in case of repeated violence by Albanian extremists, both sides would act the same like in 2001. Some expert analyses estimate that in case of arm conflict or attacks by terrorist groups from Kosovo, the police of Republic of Serbia would not be able to respond. Therefore, like in 2000 and 2001, the solution will have to be found in cooperation with NATO forces deployed in Macedonia and Kosovo. This allows active involvement of NATO in the solution of crisis without material costs and human risks. Accordingly, during the armed conflicts in this part of Serbia, the cooperation between NATO and Serbian/FRY authorities was established. Two goals were reached through this cooperation with minor risks and without any loss for NATO: first, the burden of security maintenance was transferred to Serbia and S&M Army and Serbia Police were returned to GSZ, making the NATO forces available for other activities; second, direct operational cooperation between S&M Army and Serbia Police which took control over the border and NATO forces began. This cooperation is expanding with sporadically. This confirms that the crisis in the South of Serbia can bring Serbia closer to NATO.

The place and role of the Serbian Army in this crisis is important. Lessons learned in 2000 and 2001, made the authorities begin restructuring the military. According the Restructuring Plan, Niš and Prishtina Army Corps merged and formed Joined Ground Forces Command in the South and East Serbia, covering one third of the territory. The Restructuring Plan of defense forces is aimed at fulfilment of conditions for joining NATO's Partnership for Peace Program. Serbia has on several occasions showed interest in accession to the Partnership for Peace Program and cooperation with NATO by offering concrete cooperation projects. However, NATO did not respond with the same enthusiasm. This was explained by the problems of cooperation between Belgrade and the ICTY in The Hague.

The restructuring of military forces in the South of Serbia is part of a comprehensive strategy of defense and reform of the Army. It includes the reduction in number of troops, simplification of command arrangements and replacement of conscripts by professional soldiers. This strategy is based on awareness of increasing new security risks such as terrorism and organized crime. In order to achieve the goals and demonstrate presence, construction of a modern military base was undertaken. The local population is deeply divided about these plans. The Albanians view the construction of a military base as a "provocation", while the Serbs welcome this idea. The division among people would certainly be mitigated if NATO forces had established their own military bases. In this context, Serbia has offered to build an air base for the United States in Niš. Although this project has not been offered to NATO, some experts think that the Serbian authorities should make this offer to the Pentagon. It seems that by now there was not enough political will for it. NATO circles attribute this to the strong influence that Russia and France have on the leadership and parts of the Serbian Army. From the US and NATO point of view, the issue of Kosovo is more important than the South of Serbia. Therefore, the future development of military and political cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and NATO will depend on the management of Kosovo crisis.

On the side of Belgrade, there are numerous problems that complicate the solution of security problems in the Republic of Serbia and in

Kosovo. First is the absence of clear political vision of Serbia, incapability of leadership to define State and national goals of the Republic of Serbia and the Serb nation. This means that there is no clear vision of security in Serbia and in the regions of Balkans and Middle East.

2. Implementation of the Government Program and Plan for Crisis Solution

During the climax of the crisis, at the end of 2000 and beginning of 2001, the majority in Serbia supported the new Government in its efforts to solve the problems in the South of Serbia (UNDP, 2001: 25). After the breakdown of DOS and the establishment of Government headed by Vojislav Koštunica, political support to the *Coordinating Body* weakened, especially the support to its President Nebojša Čović who was a vice-president in the former Government. The main reason for losing support is unconvincing Čović's policy that followed the Albanian extremist violence in Kosovo (March 17-20, 2004) and his cooperation with the Movement of Serbia's Forces (PSS), run by the controversial tycoon Bogoljub Karić.

On February 6, 2001, the *Coordinating Body* adopted a *Program and Plan for Solution of the Crisis Resulting from Actions of Albanian Extremist Groups in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Preševo and Medvedja*.

The *Government Program* for Preševo Valley represents a classic example of a general Government program for resolving a political crisis by peaceful means with the application of confidence-building measures. This peace process differs from peace processes in Kosovo and Macedonia that are based on for crisis management programs. It is different from the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is based on the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords.

The *Government Program* has set the following objectives:

- Resolving the crisis by peaceful means with the involvement of Albanians and in cooperation with the international community;
- Constant readiness of security forces to protect citizens, settlements and communication lines, prevention of terrorism spreading outside the limits of the GSZ and carrying out anti-terrorist actions, if necessary and acceptable;
- “Making a multiethnic society in which all civil and human rights of Albanians will be respected and basic interests of Serbs protected both in the region and in Kosovo and Metohija, along with gradual return of interethnic confidence and tolerance” (*Information*, 2001:8).

Resolving the crisis must go through the objectives detailed below:

- Elimination of all threats to constitutional and legal order and violations of State sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Preševo Valley;
- Normalization of the work of Government bodies of local self-Government and other legal bodies in the territory;
- Ensuring personal and property security for all citizens – and ensuring undisturbed freedom of movement in every segment of the territory, by completely disbanding and disarming terrorists, by demilitarizing the region, and by making provision for the return of all refugee citizens to their homes;
- Building a multiethnic and multi-religious society, based on democratic principles, where human, political, and minority rights and freedoms of all citizens are respected according to the highest standards;
- Encouraging prosperous and rapid economic and social development of those municipalities in the interest of all citizens that live in them, with international financial aid. (*Program and Plan*, 2001:1).

These objectives would have to be accomplished in three stages:

The first stage involves the integration of Albanians into the Government and social system and respect of their human rights by adjusting the ethnic composition of social services, employment and social activities to the ethnic structure of the population; by making provisions for appropriate representation of Albanians in executive boards of municipal assemblies and in the Government of Serbia and, later on, in municipal assemblies and in the People's Assembly of Serbia; and by stamping out all forms of human rights violations through stronger control of police and other Government bodies; direct, clear, and public international pressure on Albanian terrorists; protection of citizens, settlements and communications systems through adequate deployment, equipment, and actions of the police; finding solutions to eliminating limitations on interventions by the police and the Army of Yugoslavia in the GSZ; establishing security and peace in the villages of Lučani and Veliki Trnovac, subject to verification by the international community (KFOR); and preparation and adoption of a plan for economic and social revitalization and development of the region, including provision for displaced persons from Kosovo.

The second stage involves establishing security in the region.

The third stage has been envisaged as the stage of political, economic and social development. This implies investment, with financial assistance from the international community in development of cattle breeding, fruit growing, forestry and other economic branches; construction of roads and water, electrical and telephone infrastructure; and reconstruction of households for return and settlement of Albanians and Serbs (*Information*, 2001:8-11; *Integration Plan of Albanians*, 2001; *Plan of Economic and Social Development*, 2001).

The "Program and Plan for Solution of the Crisis Resulting from Actions of Albanian Extremist Groups" spells out elaborate tasks for crisis solving and fixes time limits for their accomplishment. The program envisages three stages: stage one, dialogue preparation; stage two, dialogue and signing of an agreement; stage three, implementation of the

agreement (*Program and Plan*, 2001:3-6). Time limits are set to run from the day of the signing of the agreement, and the whole program is to be executed over the course of 36 months.

Table 2: Accomplishment of tasks by stages (in percentages)

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Stages I and II</i> S+2 Months	<i>Stage III</i> S+4 Months	<i>Stage IV</i> S+8 Months	<i>Stage V</i> S+24 Months	<i>Stage VI</i> S+36 Months	<i>Plan</i>
Integration of Albanians	10%	20%	40%	99%	100%	Annex 5a
Establishment of security and peace in the region	10%	100%	100%	100%	100%	Annex 5b
Economic and social development of the region	5%	10%	30%	65%	100%	Annex 5v

The international community and above all, KFOR, the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the observer mission of the EU and humanitarian organizations, are expected to make special efforts in the following areas: exerting pressure on extremist Albanians to abandon terrorism and ideas about autonomy and separatism and to accept integration into the system of the Republic of Serbia; selecting political representatives of Albanians for a dialogue with representatives of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; supervising and verifying the implementation of agreements and accords reached by both parties and pressuring whichever party does not respect what was agreed upon; cooperating in working out a model for resolving individual issues, especially in training of multiethnic police forces; providing financial assistance for economic reconstruction of the region; and supporting anti-terrorist

actions if the crisis is not solved peacefully (*Information*, 2001: 11, 12; *International Community*, 2001). In an effort to carry out this cooperation, the *Government Program* for the Preševo Valley was presented to NATO, EU, and OSCE, all of which gave it support (Čović, 2001: 2).

Although the deadline for the implementation of *Government Program* is coming to an end, any comprehensive analysis of its implementation has not been drafted yet, and there are no updated action plans. Yet, based on existing data, it can be concluded that the *Government Program* has been partially implemented.

The most important achievement is that armed violence has stopped and all other forms of violence have been reduced. Early in March 2001, indirect negotiations, conducted through international mediators, were initiated. Representatives of NATO and KFOR finalized the work. Peter Fay and Sean Sullivan, envoys of the NATO Secretary-General, and Italian General Carlo Cabigioso, Commander of the section of KFOR forces, were mediators between the representative of Belgrade and the Commander-in-Chief of the LAPMB, Sefcet Mulsiu. The efficiency of the engagement of NATO representatives might have been due to the fear of having a new Balkan battlefield on the border of Macedonia – and the fear that the Yugoslav military and police forces would have to take over “part of the job.” Negotiations led to the signing of the *Agreement on Ceasefire, Disarmament of Extremist Groups and Full Relaxation of GSZ* by the Army of Yugoslavia and Serbian police. Such an outcome would not be possible without the great help by the international community, especially NATO (KFOR).

The agreement allowed a joint detachment of the Serbian-Yugoslav security forces to enter a 25-kilometer-long section of the GSZ, in an area along the Yugoslav-Macedonian border known as “Sector B.” Three Albanian villages, Norca, Trnova, and Miratovac, are in this zone. This was followed by rapid downsizing of soldiers and policemen. In May 2001, for example, there were 6130 police officers and 8500 soldiers, and in February 2002, the number was reduced to 985 police officers and 1390 soldiers deployed in 27 locations.

Based on the *Declaration on Demilitarization* of 24 May 2001, the disarmament of the LAPBM was announced, and instead of withdrawal of military and police forces, as provided for in the *Government Program*, the Army of Yugoslavia and special police forces were increased in the zone 5 km from the Kosovo and Macedonian borders.

LAPBM guerrillas were urged to lay down their arms in exchange for a general amnesty, applicable in Southern Serbia and Kosovo.

Since August 17, 2001, a new stage has ensued, the so-called GSZ relaxation, which means police and military forces of the Republic of Serbia have been allowed to come to the border with Kosovo. This step was important for several reasons. For one thing, the presence of troops next to the border stabilized the security situation in Kosovo before the forthcoming general elections. The troops also reduced the real threat of a broader renewal of terrorist and armed conflicts in the Preševo Valley, a threat that arose after hostilities in Macedonia were interrupted. The deployment of soldiers also represented a signal from the Government in Belgrade that Serbs from Kosovo should go to the general polls in Kosovo and establish a single administration for all of Kosovo, including its Northern part.

The Albanian negotiators noted that disarmament of the LAPMB had been carried out, yet the presence of Serb Government military and police forces was increased instead of being decreased.

Yet, despite the shortcomings of the “Program and Plan for a Solution to the Crisis,” there is no dispute that significant results have been achieved in stabilizing the situation at the level of local communities, in all of Southern Serbia, and in the entire Republic of Serbia. In fact, the program qualifies as an example of “best practice”. This does not exclude the need to follow up, giving special attention to all the problems involved in this peaceful process as a part of institution building. It is also important to watch for the risk of renewal of conflicts.

The improvement in the security of the entire area enabled full freedom of movement. The establishment and training of multiethnic police

played an important role in securing this freedom. This project is being realized with the cooperation and aid of the OSCE. In Mitrovo polje, near Kraljevo, a center was opened to train multiethnic police forces, and in Serbian and Albanian villages in the areas of Bujanovac and Preševo, several police Headquarters with a multiethnic mix of officers have been established. This is first of the projects to include Albanians in Government bodies.

But, the *Government Program* and the activities for their implementation have not been sufficient to marginalize Albanian extremism and to change a decade long policy of Serbian domination on the local level in these municipalities, and on the regional level in the South of Serbia, and in particular to cut off connection among the Albanian armed extremist from the South of Serbia, Kosovo and western Macedonia (ICG, 2001a:ii).

Programs for returning displaced persons have been implemented in cooperation with the UNHCR, the Swiss Organization for Development and Cooperation, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Tearfund, the Government of Serbia and municipal humanitarian funds. For example, 1200 inhabitants were returned to Karadak. Houses have been repaired and humanitarian assistance has been provided. In cooperation with the UNHCR and EU Monitoring Mission Regional Office, 8763 Albanian internally displaced persons, out of an estimated total of 12,500, were returned to their homes in the period between May 31 and September 16, 2001. Nonetheless, a considerable number of Albanians from these municipalities still live in Kosovo and western Macedonia.

The international community, led by the American administration, supported and financially assisted infrastructure repair with an initial investment of USD 600,000. Since August 2001, investment activities have been also intensified in the municipality of Preševo. Major support has arrived from the European Agency for Development, USAID, CHF International, agencies from Norway, Germany, Italy, and Austria and the Red Cross from many countries. In addition, sufficient funds were transferred to the budget of the municipality of Preševo from the

Republic of Serbia budget, so that this municipality could keep pace with investment activities of foreign agencies in the field of infrastructure, public utilities and public activities projects. Since 2001, around 50 million Euros was invested in this region, and in the last two years around 10 million Euros (248,259,625 Dinars, or 4 million Euros in 2004 and 551,093,267 Dinars, or 6 million Euros in 2005). Implementation of other projects is also under way, including efforts to support small-and medium-sized enterprises, training and equipping of local administration, and various projects of NGOs. Around 300 km of roads were reconstructed, along with schools, kindergartens, municipal and sports centers, and health institutions. In cooperation with the OSCE, staff was trained for the radio and television stations that were opened at Bujanovac and Preševo. In cooperation with the OSCE, a media project is underway for the establishment of multiethnic editorial offices and integration of Albanians into management structure of any publicly owned media. The process of recognition of certificates from higher educational institutions in Kosovo is also in progress. The area's religious communities have been given aid amounting to 213,000 Euros.

One of the weaknesses of implementation of the *Government Program* for the Preševo Valley is that the political and legal measures are being applied slowly and incompletely. Numerous mistakes have also been made in the area of political negotiation and provision for participation of Albanians in State decision-making and political and public life.

Despite numerous initiatives for the development of civil society and civil organizations, local Serbs do not sufficiently participate in important joint projects with local Albanians. Local Serbs are also left out of major political negotiations. The election for local Government bodies was held on July 28, 2002, after a delay of almost one year. All these problems resulted in the weakening of the original support of Albanians, as well as of other citizens in the South of Serbia, for the implementation measures of the *Program* and *Plan for Solution of the Crisis Resulting from Actions of Albanian Extremist Groups*.

The census has not been regularly carried out in the municipalities of Bujanovac, Preševo and Medvedja since 1981. The exact population of

Serbs, Albanians and Roma could therefore only be guessed at for the past 21 year (Iric, 2002, A6). Although the census was insufficiently prepared, and although political circumstances in the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are very complex, the census nevertheless took place in 2002. Yet, by the decision of the federal Government, the census was limited to the territory of Serbia. The census also created numerous unsolved problems relating to the status of refugees and internally displaced persons. Those who have fled Kosovo and are living in Serbia are mostly Serbs and Roma, while those who left Southern Serbia and live in Kosovo are mostly Albanians. The division occurred because the census covered only that part of the diaspora organized in officially recognized refugee clubs. A lot of Albanians who are temporarily abroad have boycotted such clubs for a decade or longer, so they were not registered. In the South of Serbia, both Serbs and Albanians kept increasing their estimates of the population of their own internally displaced persons, demanding that these people have the right to vote in the forthcoming local elections. One of the positive aspects of the organization of the census is that the forms issued in Preševo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac have been printed in both the Serbian and Albanian languages—though, unfortunately, not in Romani. It is also encouraging to see that the census was carried out by Albanian, Serbian, and Roma census officials, under the supervision of OSCE representatives. The arguments over the census have politically mobilized Albanians and Serbs along ethno-nationalistic lines. Fortunately, some last-minute compromises have helped defuse extremist manifestations of ethnic politics. Citizens continue to speculate what the real ethnic breakdown of the population is. Albanians claim that Bujanovac now has a population that is 62% Albanian.

The new election law improved the election system. It increased the representation of women and required the use of multilingual election materials. The law has significant shortcomings, which were noted previously by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, including the allocation and removal of councillor's mandates after the election remain in the control of political parties; political plurality and multiethnic representation within the permanent membership of election administration bodies is not guaranteed by law,

but in practice pluralism was provided; The accreditation and presence of domestic observers in polling stations is not provided in law, but they were given unhindered access in practice; the provisions for inclusion on voter lists do not include a residence deadline in a given municipality, and the timeframe for the election administration is overall compressed. (Statement, 2001:1).

The *Coordinating Body* has to be further restructured, since it showed many weaknesses. Its main shortcoming is the absence of strategic planning and inefficient leadership (from the middle of 2002), marred by many high-level resignations. By appointing politicians who have other assignments, the Government shows that it does not pay much attention to this body.

An increase in political violence is possible, as well as more frequent murders out of mixed criminal-political motives, because the illegal economy here is one of the basic sources of existence of citizens, out of which political structures are being financed. However, judging from the experience from the Western Balkans during the last decade, constant tensions and occasional armed violence are most convenient to organized crime, for which the control of Preševo – Veliki Trnovac direction (in the municipality of Bujanovac) – Gnjilane and Podujevo (in Kosovo) are very important. All in all it may be concluded that the political conflict between Albanians and Serbs in Bujanovac, and in the South of Serbia as well, is in a half-stifled State and that as such hinders the life of ordinary people. This, however, represents an exceptionally efficient means for the control of political elites both of the local ones and those in Belgrade, and indirectly in Kosovo and in western Macedonia. This instrument is being used by some structures of international presence in this region.

Experts in the Western Balkans expected that the beginning of talks on the future status of Kosovo mobilized and intensified the preparations of all interested parties whose expectations and fears also increased. This makes the problem even more complicated. The *Political Platform of the Assembly Representatives – Albanians in the Preševo Valley (Preševo,*

Bujanovac and Medvedja), adopted on January 4, 2006 in Preševo, confirms this.

During talks on the future status of Kosovo it became clear that the Kosovo Negotiations Team and its supporters linked the position of Serbs in the South of Kosovo and Albanians in the Preševo Valley. This encourages the Albanians in the Preševo Valley to ask the same rights and status of autonomy like the Serbs in Kosovo. This can restrict the demands for division of Kosovo along ethnic lines. Naturally, this is only under the condition that the international community remains against the division. According to the Albanian leaders, if the international community allows the division of Kosovo, Bujanovac, Medvedja and Preševo should become a part of Kosovo. This is the “exchange of the territory of North Kosovo“, the former NATO zone “M“, for the former NATO zone “B“. The importance of this instrument for Albanians is proved by the fact that Veton Suroi, Member of the Albanian negotiations team is the representative of Albanians from the South of Serbia. Mayor of Preševo and Albanian leader Mustafa confirms that Albanian aspirations are much greater. According to him, the results of negotiation on the future status of Kosovo between Belgrade and Prishtina will determine the decision of Albanians in Preševo Valley whether to stay in the Serbian State, or not. This Statement contains the request for accession of these municipalities to an “independent” Kosovo.

According to the principles of the *Platform* “in the period when Kosovo enters the most important phase of determination of its political and legal subjectivity, and when the entire region of Western Balkans wishes to accelerate the process of Euro-Atlantic integration”, Albanians in the Preševo Valley should undertake concrete and coordinated activities for the solution of the issue of Albanians in the region. The statement of Albanian representatives in the local assemblies of the three municipalities sounds threatening: “Until the right solution of Albanians from this Valley is found, the entire region will be a hot-spot and obstacle for Euro-Atlantic integration”.

According to them, the “right solution” to their problems would be the provision of guarantees to Albanians in the Preševo Valley within the framework of “national communities in the region” (Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro); to establish a “special connections between the Preševo Valley and Kosovo”. The view of most Albanians that is expressed in the *Platform* is that they are not a national minority, but a part of a nation that is cut off from the “Albanian national body” that will be reunited with Kosovo when it gains its independence.

The Albanian representatives in the municipal assemblies have some “special demands” for “just and consistent resolution of the Preševo Valley issue”, and respect of the following individual and collective rights of Albanians:

- Constitutional administrative/territorial organization of Preševo Valley in the areas of: judiciary, police, use of language and national symbols, health care, economic development, culture, local planning, environment, natural resources, housing and social welfare;
- Decentralization of power in Serbia and transfer of authority from the central to local and regional level and other State institutions, especially in the judiciary sector by setting up a regional and commercial court and misdemeanor council with territorial competence;
- Full demilitarization of the Preševo Valley and dislocation of all military bases of the Serbian Army;
- Release of all young Albanians from military duty in the Serbian Army;
- Public security to be within the exclusive responsibility of multiethnic police and their command structures;
- Creation of better conditions for development of SME sector, FDI, setting up of business centres, free trade zones, border cooperation, through creation of a business-friendly environment and donor support;
- Privatization of the existing publicly-owned enterprises under the same conditions for all participants of the privatization process;

- Alignment of the education system of the Preševo Valley with the education system in Kosovo, and in compliance with EU standards;
- Proportional representation of Albanians in local Government, State and public institutions, at all levels of authority;
- Official use of Albanian language in local institutions of power, State and public institutions, at all levels of authority;
- Official use of Albanian national symbols and right to celebrate important days from national history;
- Establishment of institutions protecting cultural, informational, religious and traditional values of the Albanian nation;
- Establishment of special institutions for social care of vulnerable populations;
- Creation of conditions for secondary health care for Preševo Valley citizens; construction of hospital and development of existing health institutions for primary health care;
- Enabling the return of internally displaced persons and compensation for damage to their property;
- Implementation of the decision on amnesty for former LAPBM members (Official Gazette, No. 37/2002 of July 3, 2002) and dropping of charges;
- Investigation and prosecution for the assassination of Albanians that took place between 1995 and 2005;
- Adequate treatment of the Albanian diaspora by Serbian State institutions and establishment of connections with their homeland, customs, language and culture, and encouraging them to invest in this area.

In order to meet the goals set in the *Platform* a National Council made up of Albanian representatives is necessary. This will prove good faith in implementing the *Law on National Minorities* that stipulates the establishment of national councils of minorities, in obedience to all provisions of the law and to the Ministry for Human Rights and Minorities of Serbia.

The final provisions of the *Platform* that deserve special attention state that by respecting the will of citizens of the Preševo Valley as a separate constitutional and territorial region, and by supporting the principles of the Contact Group regarding the status of Kosovo, the representatives in the municipalities of the Preševo Valley vow to unite to Kosovo, in case of disrespect of these principles and change of the Kosovo borders.

The *Platform* contains a number of requests that can be met within the framework of a proactive minority policy of the Serbian and S&M authorities, and by fulfillment of the obligations undertaken by Serbia in the negotiations on the peaceful termination of conflict in this part of Central Serbia.

The goals of Pan-Albanian Movement are present in the *Platform*. They are seen connecting the status of Albanians in this part of Serbia with the coming talks on the future status of Kosovo. The *Platform* also recalls the political achievement of armed resistance of Albanians from this region, referring most probably to armed riots of Albanians in 2000 and 2001, after the fall of Milošević. But, such a broad definition can easily refer to the participation of Albanians from the South of Serbia in armed actions in Kosovo, as members of KLA, and in armed conflicts in Macedonia from 2001, until November-December 2004, when many Albanians from these Serbian municipalities, as members of ANA, kept under the control the village of Kondovo near Skopje.

The *Platform* states that the main goal of Albanians is to preserve and develop the identity of Albanian nationality and “comprehensive forms of integration of Albanians, within the trends of European and Euro-Athlantic integrations”. This unclear formulation is a novelty in the “vocabulary of Pan-Albanian Movement”. This is a “modern term” for an old demand. In fact, it is the same phrase that was created in Tirana after the removal of Berisha from power in armed riots in 1997, claiming that the concept of “Greater Albania” is not common in Albania. Instead, more favorable is the concept according to which “all Albanians will be united in Greater Europe”. Albanian leaders from the South of Serbia, the same as the leadership in Tirana at that time tend to use the language that will mitigate the “concern” of the international community about the

possibly destabilizing influence of the Pan-Albanian movement on the Western Balkans.

Albanian leaders in the South of Serbia and Prishtina publically state the intention of obtaining international support for Albanian demands. There is no doubt that the request of Albanian political leadership from these municipalities will be directly (through various political activities, and most probably rallies organized in Serbia, Vienna and other international locales where meetings on the future status of Kosovo are held) and indirectly (through Veton Suroi, member of the Kosovo Albanians Negotiations Team and the representative of interests of Albanian minority in the South of Serbia) presented to the Special Representative for Talks on the Future Status of Kosovo. The aim is to weaken the position of Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs in their request for institutional protection of national communities and decentralization. The *Platform* is an Albanian response to Belgrade's request for entities and "political legalization" of possible "exchange" of territories of the municipalities in the South of Serbia for the municipalities in the North of Kosovo, if the Contact Group's principle on territorial integrity of Kosovo is violated (as it is stated in the final provisions of the *Platform*).

3. Recommendations for the Improvement of the Peace Process

In the forthcoming period, it is essential to implement the following measures to establish the confidence of the local population of Southern Serbia:

- Reform the *Coordinating Body* and include Albanian representatives in its work;
- Develop the concept of proactive policy implemented by Serbia and integrate Albanians in Serbian institutions;
- Develop an economic strategy for this area and plan for social-economic revitalization of settlements through the improvement of economic status of all citizens in the region;
- Further develop multiethnic police;
- Reform local media;
- Raise the level of civil initiatives, etc.

It is essential that Belgrade, Prishtina, Skopje as well as the representatives of the international community maintain close cooperation in the sub-region of Serbia-Kosovo-Macedonia in undertaking coordinated measures for stabilization, development and confidence building among the quarrelling ethnic communities.

Considering the connections between the political activities of Albanians in the Western Balkans and risks of organized crime, political extremism and terrorism in Kosovo and Serbia, and in the Western Balkans, the Contact Group for the Balkans should reconsider the latest events in Kosovo and in the South of Serbia. The risk of armed violence and terrorism, and especially transfer of extremist actions to Macedonia would “reshape” this country according to Albanian demands into a “bi-national federation”. Hence political measures ensuring the security of communities within the future status of Kosovo is essential, as it cannot be decoupled from the status of Albanians in the Preševo Valley.

Dušan Janjić, PhD

Forum for Ethnic Relations, Belgrade

References:

“Agreement on Crisis Solution in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja. Approach to Elaboration” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001.

Arvanitis, Nikolaos. D.A. (2002) Balkanski čvor (Balkan Knot) ANDA Info, Belgrade.

Bjelica, J. (2002) Nova stranka na jugu Srbije traži ujedinjenje s Kosovom (The New Party in the South of Serbia Demands the Unification with Kosovo). Reporter, Banja Luka, July.

“Current Political Situation in the Municipality of Presevo” (2001), Municipal Assembly of Presevo, Presevo, Nov. 25, 2001.

“Comments on the Program and Plan for Resolving the Crisis Adopted by the Governments of the FRY and RS” (2001), Municipal Assembly of Presevo, Presevo, March 19, 2001.

Čović, Nebojša (2001). Statement by H.E. Dr Nebojša Čović, Deputy Prime Minister of the Yugoslav Constituent Republic of Serbia and President of the Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations, New York, September 17, 2001.

Halimi, Riza (2002) Značajan korak ka pomirenju (An Important Step Towards the Reconciliation . Razgovor. Politika. Belgrade, July 8.

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2001) After Milosevic: A Practical Agenda for a Lasting Balkans Peace, International Crisis Group, Brussels.

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2001a) “Peace in Presevo: Quick Fix or Long Term Solution?” International Crisis Group, Balkans Report, Pristina, Belgrade, Brussels, No 116, Aug. 10, 2001.

“Information on the Security Situation in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja, with Proposed Measures for Resolution of the Crisis” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001.

“International Community in Solving the Crisis in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001, Annex 4.

“Invitation to Albanians for a Dialogue on Solving the Crisis in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001, Annex 3.

Irić, Radoman (2002) Demografija politike (Demography of Politics), Politika, Belgrade, August 7.

Kordić, Marija (2002) Šiptari bi se odmah otcepili, ali neće jer su planirali da osvoje Vranje, Nedeljni Telgraf, Belgrade, August 7.

“Plan of Economic and Social Development of the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001, Annex 5v.

“Plan of Integration of Albanians into Political, State and Social System of the Republic Serbia” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001, Annex 5a.

“Plan of Media Support to Peaceful Solution of the Crisis in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001, Annex 2.

Popović, Ljubiša (2002) Bitka za Bujanovac, NIN, Beograd, 4 July.

“Program and Plan for Solution of the Crisis Resulting from Actions of Albanian Extremist Groups in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Presevo, and Medvedja” (2001), Coordinating Body of the Federal and Republican Governments for Municipalities, Bujanovac, Feb. 6, 2001.

UNDP (2001) Challenges of Implementing the Reform Agenda: One Year After the Democratic Breakthrough, Annual Review (Serbia) of the Early Warning System for FRY, United Nations Development Program. Federal Republic Yugoslavia-Republic of Serbia, October 2000-October 2001.