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Center for European Integration Studies  
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**Greece, the Balkans  
and the European Union**

Discussion Paper

C 9  
1998

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*Thanos Veremis*

## **Greece, the Balkans and the European Union**

The Kosovo is very much in view now. One should say that Kosovo is really a very old conflict, and many thought that Yugoslavia would have disintegrated over the Kosovo issue, rather than Bosnia or Croatia. Strangely enough, Kosovo did not erupt as some had predicted in 1989 and 1990, when Mr. Milošević took away the Kosovo-Albanians autonomy, which they had enjoyed under the previous regime and especially after the reform of the Yugoslavian constitution in 1974. At that time Kosovo was given more autonomy than it had previously enjoyed, but an autonomy short of complete independence as a constituent republic of Yugoslavia. That was always the thorn in the side of the Albanian Kosovars: they wanted to be recognized as a full republic with the right to secession. This is where the crunch lies, if you will. The full republics in Yugoslavia also had the right to secession, whereas autonomous territories such as Vojvodina and Kosovo did not have this right. So these territories always hoped to upgrade their position from a mere territory to a full republic. Instead, in 1989, after a series of turbulence and problems, Milošević – president of Serbia at that time – decided to take away their autonomy, and revert Kosovo to a province of Serbia. The present state of affairs is this: there are two parallel states in Kosovo, which do not communicate with each other. At least, the Albanian state does not want to communicate with the Serbian state, because it would legitimize it if it did: this is the line of argument that the Kosovar Albanians have. They therefore would want to communicate with the state only through international interlocutors. This is of course something that the Serbs do not

want, because that would weaken their position and confer upon the Albanian Kosovars a kind of status of a semi-independent entity, which they would never want to recognize. The Serbs, in other words, welcome a bilateral meeting and agreement; the Albanians do not, because this would legitimize the Serbs as a ruling authority. There are many other problems, of course, beside this technical problem of the two meeting and discussing the issues. Having said that, one should however note that in the summer of 1996 Ibrahim Rugova, who is president of the Albanian community, and Mr. Milošević signed a document allowing the return of students to secondary and higher educational institutions in Kosovo. This agreement had facilitated the legitimate return of the student to their schools, the schools provided by the state. The two sides had signed this agreement, which implies that Milošević had indirectly acknowledged Rugova's authority, and that Rugova had also acknowledged indirectly the authority of Milošević. Nevertheless, this agreement has not as of yet been implemented. It would certainly have been a wonderful confidence-building measure if it had.

Now, things as they stand today are again entering a difficult phase. The reason for that is this: Whereas Rugova's policy had been one of non-violence, a Ghandi-esque kind of policy vis-a-vis the Serbian authorities, somewhere along the line a more activist and terroristic movement has evolved, which in fact has been employing violence in promoting the agenda of Kosovar independence. This, I think, is escalating the confrontation between Serbs and Kosovars, or between the official state and the Albanian community. I should also point out that the Western position vis-avis the pleas of independence of the Albanian Kosovars has been a negative one. In other words: the West has not encouraged independence because that would mean changing the map of the region, creating a new state. But the West has encouraged a new concept of autonomy. The Albanian Kosovars dislike the term "autonomy"; if you use it in their presence, they react in a very negative way. I did commit this impropriety at one point and they gasped and said: "Autonomy? Don't ever use this word again." Instead they prefer other terms, such as "special regime" or

other diplomatic ways of going around the use of the term autonomy. This word has been tainted by Milošević's withdrawal of that which had been theirs before 1989. So they argue: „What is the point of returning to an autonomy which the Serbs can always take away, thereby reducing us to the present state of affairs?“ The Serb authorities refuse to discuss independence but they will discuss autonomy. They say: „They already have autonomy, but they don't use it. Look at them, the Serbian authorities say, they won't even take part in the national elections; if they did, they would find out that they would have a sizable representation in parliament.“ In fact, if they do take part in elections fifteen years from now they may find that they have a majority in the parliament of the federal government of Yugoslavia, or whatever it might be called then. The reason for this is that the birth rate among the Albanian population is very high as opposed to that of the Serbs, which is very low. Given the present birth rate I think they may find it opportune in the future, if the problem is still as it is today and no conflagration has occurred, they may decide to enter elections and use the parliamentary venue for controlling their fate. Then the Serbs will be in a very difficult position. But, so far, they have not; they have abstained from elections.

The present situation is not at all a desirable state of affairs, because the two communities live separately and may cause a chain reaction of problems in the region. One of the problems, of course, is implicating in this conflict the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), which has a sizable Albanian minority that is craving for the status of a constituent community in the state of FYROM. Now: Why will the Kosovo problem trickle into Skopje? Mainly because the leading elite of the Albanians of that state have in fact been educated and bred in Pristina in the days when the University of Pristina was within an autonomous state and the two populations could move back and forth because they were part of the same federation. Since FYROM became an independent state, the movement of people between Skopje and Pristina has become much more difficult. The attempt of the Albanian Macedonians to set up a university was frustrated by the state and was not allowed to take place. So the Al-

banian Macedonians have serious qualms. This could lead to more trouble, should Kosovo erupt. There is also the other angle of the triangle between Pristina, Skopje (or Tetovo, if you like) and Tirana: that is Albania. Albania could have acted as a catalyst for an uprising, if Mr. Berisha were still in power. Mr. Berisha was president of Albania and used to be very supportive of the Albanian Kosovars in the past. There came a point when he became less supportive and he fell out of grace with Rugova. The two were not on very good terms toward the end of Berisha's presidency. But the present Prime Minister of Albania, Mr. Fatos Nono, is even less willing to go out of his way to support an uprising in Kosovo. For what reason? Mainly because he has too many troubles of his own at home, especially after the collapse of the pyramids and the uprisings, shootings and the problems which ensued thereafter; he is also trying to put his economy in order; and trying to establish contacts with the West; he is craving for Western financial assistance. Therefore, a problem of this magnitude in his backyard which would drive refugees into Albania, is the last thing he would like to see. I think he is discouraging activism on the part of his Albanian compatriots on the other side of the frontier. However, nothing is set or predetermined in history. Things occur when we least expect them to occur. As I said, one expected a conflagration between the early 90's and 1997, nothing or at least very little happened in spite of prognostications. It may happen now, when things appear to be quiet in the rest of Yugoslavia.

This brings me to the other side of the problem with Kosovo, which is Bosnia. What happens in Kosovo in a way depends what will happen in Bosnia. Why? Because Bosnia will act as a paradigm, as an example for Kosovo. It already has. I think the first lesson of the Dayton Agreement for the Albanian Kosovars has been a negative lesson. The insurgents in Bosnia were recognized as parlaying parties at the negotiation table at Dayton, and each got his own piece of the pie. However, there was nothing in the Dayton Agreement concerning the Albanians in Kosovo, who kept their peace and did nothing – in both cases, they got very little for behaving, as opposed to the others, who got something for their mis-

conduct. So that was the first negative lesson for the Albanian Kosovars from the Dayton Peace Accord. They are very much waiting to see what will come out of Dayton today. Given the state of affairs of today, nothing much can come out of Dayton, except the maintenance of the status quo, which is not an easy task, anyway. But nothing radical appears to be happening or will happen in the near future, especially if the SFOR retains its positions in Bosnia – i.e., if the Americans do not withdraw their forces, because the SFOR is really based on the American presence. (The Europeans have stated their lack of willingness to remain, if the Americans should decide to leave.) If the SFOR remains – my guess is that it probably will, for a while – things will not change radically. But there are three possibilities in Bosnia. One, is this state of loose confederation, which we have. Another is dismemberment, which may occur if the SFOR leaves and there is fighting again. Finally, the American dream would be to bring Bosnia together again, like Humpty-Dumpty, but a kind of multi-ethnic Humpty-Dumpty: a loose confederation of different ethnic groups that could move freely and re-establish themselves in the region of their preference. It sounds a bit optimistic, but it is another possible agenda for Bosnia. If partition occurs, the Kosovar Albanians will certainly take this as an indication of what they ought to do. So: there is another problem in the region: Bosnia as a possible model for the future of the Kosovar Albanians. Of course, having said all this, one may witness violence without such developments, because violence tends to breed on itself. If the Serbs decide to quell the demonstrations of the students and the young people in the streets of Pristina – frankly, there are more young people in Pristina than I have ever seen anywhere else (the average age must be below twenty: a very young population, vigorous and ready to act) if the Serbs put down these demonstrations with violence, this may lead to more violence and maybe even to a full-scale confrontation.

It is interesting to witness this development at the time when things are also happening in Serbia itself. To what extent they are progressing, it is very difficult to say, but Serbia has a new president, Mr. Milutinovich, who was very much Mr. Milošević's man: he was Foreign Minister of

Yugoslavia and very loyal to Milošević. But, he has more power now, institutionally speaking, than Milošević has. Assuming he wants to leave his mark on history and emancipate himself from Mr. Milošević's influence, he could easily do it by acting in a much more liberal way than his predecessor and by opening up to the rest of the world. Frankly, the incentives are there. I think there are a series of openings which the United States and the European Union have made possible: a partial lifting of the existing embargoes to give the Serbs the message that Europe and United States are willing to go a long way, if Milošević observes the rules of the game. Given the fact that Mr. Dodik was elected Prime Minister of the Republic Serbska – Dodik, who has exhibited some of his good intentions lately by promising to uphold the provisions of the Dayton Agreement and to also help the SFOR forces bring some of the war criminals to the justice of the United Nations. So there are indications of movement, Mr. Karadjic notwithstanding, there is some improvement in the relations of the state of Serbia with the Republic of Serbska. This is not to say that they are one and the same, but there are very strong connections, no doubt. Much, therefore, will depend on the behavior of the state of Yugoslavia in the future. As I said, Mr. Milutinovič is not a known quantity. We have known him as Milošević's man in the past. We also know that the opposition to Milošević has not won its spurs in liberal and democratic politics. Neither Mr. Gingich nor Mr. Draskovič are the best examples of parliamentary and liberal democracy. Alas, this is one of the problems which bedevil Serbian politics: the lack of a credible opposition with a vision and a future. Instead, you have a old-time communist or nationalist entering the opposition against Milošević.

Given all that, it is very difficult to be optimistic that politics will change drastically in Yugoslavia. But the element of surprise has always been a thing of history. So we will just hope and wait, hope that the quelling of these demonstrations will not become so violent as to preempt further demonstrations. I don't think the Albanian Kosovars are willing to go a long way right now because their own elections are pending. They would rather have a legitimate government backed by popular vote before going

in any direction. Rugova is opposed to violence, anyway – that has always been his hallmark. And I don't think that there is any really strong feeling on the part of Demacik either for a confrontation of this nature.

The question that remains in the region is Albanian irredentism in general. Kosovo is one thing; then there is Tetovo and Skopje, with sizable Albanian populations. There's Albania itself, which is now undergoing a very difficult period of re-adjusting and reforming its economy and reforming its political system in general. Albania is the Rip van Winkle of the Balkans: a state that fell asleep fifty years ago and woke up when the world was totally changed. Everything had changed around it and it had to catch up after so many years of the most insular Communist regime in the world. For those who have not seen a very interesting film, I do recommend you see it: an Italian film called "L'America". It's about Albania waking up after all those years of the Hoja- regime. It's a film of the early 90's. "L'America" – an Italian film: wonderful, to the point. Not a documentary, but a documentary in fact – it does give you a view of what Albania was, and still is, to a great extent. So, what I think we are witnessing is a postponement of the Albanian question. What happens with all these three elements of Albania: Albania proper, and Kosovo, which is in fact the cradle of modern Albanian nationalism: this is where the Albanians gained a new secular, national identity. And of course the upcoming Albanian element in FYROM, which is both growing in numbers and in financial capability: they have a huge diaspora which is investing in the state; they are hard-working; they have tremendous drive. As I said, this threesome, the three sides of this triangle will certainly be in the news in the future.

Greece in the 70's and 80's was in the vanguard of a multilateral Balkan get-together. Greece championed multilateralism, especially during the Communist era and after 1974 when Greece emerged out of its own dictatorship. Mr. Karamanlis, the first Prime Minister after 1974, embarked in getting the Balkan states together in a kind of multilateral activity. Then, later on, Mr. Papandrejou continued this tradition of Balkan multi-

lateralism even more vigorously when he became Prime Minister. In spite of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Bulgaria – Bulgaria was the closest to the Soviet Union’s foreign policy position -, the not-too-enthusiastic position of Yugoslavia in those days , and the very enthusiastic position of Rumania – Rumania was always very keen on multilateralism in the Balkans – in spite of all these things, I think there was movement in the direction of multilateral co-operation. Even the term “federation” was resurrected from the pre-war period (1934). The collapse of the Soviet Union, instead of allowing Greece to play this role at last – a role she had cultivated for so many years – brought about a rather unexpected turn of events. Nationalism flourished, not only in Greece but in all the countries of the region, and fed upon the nationalism of each neighbor. Unfortunately, nationalisms cause incompatibility: when one state is nationalistic, the other tends to react in the same way. It is a contagion that works in a very negative way, and this contagion did affect Greece negatively. Its foreign policy was a policy of lost opportunities, as some people say in Greece. Fortunately, it’s never too late. I think things began to change especially since 1995, with the interim agreement between FYROM and Greece. In the summer of 1995, in which the state agreed to give up its national symbol, which was a misconceived symbol anyway – they had taken up the sun of the Macedonian dynasty, which was in fact first discovered by the public in the late 70’s. It was an archeological find in Greece which brought this sun of the Macedonian dynasty to the fore and made it prominent, and then at some point the state of FYROM took it over as their national insignia. This of course made the Greeks livid and created all kinds of problems. So: in 1995 the flag was given up, and a new flag appeared in its place. Greece lifted its embargo and relations proceeded smoothly since. Trade between the two states is very good now, and there is much Greek investment in FYROM. Relations between Greece and Albania were also very problematic between 1992/93 and 1996/97. There were all kinds of problems. But: things are looking up and have, in fact, improved markedly thanks to the good services of the United States: specifically, thanks to Mr. Shifter, who acted as a go-

between in 1995, when relations were blocked. Today they are on the good side, especially since the breakdown of authority in Albania. There was an OSCE presence there, and I think that the Western European Union missed a wonderful opportunity to play a particular role. Greece also participated and did a good job in its own stead. So: relations are good with Albania; they are OK with FYROM; they have been relatively good with Bulgaria since the late 70's and continue – with ups and downs – to be on the good side. Relations with Rumania were always good and pleasant; we never had problems with Rumania.

On the whole, relations are improving in the Balkan region; businessmen are belatedly discovering the opportunities they lost due to the problems between Greece and FYROM and Greece and Albania. Greece, again, has taken the initiative to play a stabilizing role in the region. It is the recipient of a huge number of economic refugees, mainly from Albania but also from the other states of the region. That in itself is a kind of stabilizing contribution, because obviously the Albanians also provide for their families in the home country. We have about 300,000 Albanians; if one multiplies that by five or six dependents, you have half of the population of Albania subsisting on the remittances of the illegal and legal Albanian workers in Greece. That is one positive contribution – but there are others, which are in fact not charity but business. Business has a longevity which charity does not. We have such a prospect in Albania and things will be looking better there as soon as the state is back in order. And this is also true for the rest of the Balkans. Of course, the Balkans are undergoing a period of *anomie* or, to use a mucholarly term used by the press: kleptocracy. A kind of wild west situation with a lack of law enforcement; mafias; strong men; family connections. In other words, we are witnessing a period at the eve of the market economy, so to speak. Hopefully this will develop into a market system such as the one we know. If it does, the Balkans will catch up and become lands of opportunity in the next decades. My feeling is that they will. To tell you the truth, I too discovered the Balkans belatedly in my life. But I discovered the Balkans in the late 80's and have found out that they are no different in their aspira-

tions to develop than any other place in the world. I should also say that they have been maligned by the press, and not just the recent press. I think they are the traditional scapegoats of the European mass media. They have been presented as the place where all kinds of odd and barbaric things occur, as if there were a congenital barbarity in the Balkan people. Of course all of this is nonsense. Let's face it: the rest of Europe did not do too well in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

One cannot malign the Balkans without placing them in historical perspective. I was very disappointed with the eminent George Kennan's introduction to the book which the Carnegie Endowment for Peace chose to re-publish in 1993, *The Other Balkan War*. This presents the findings of research during the Balkan wars, 1912-13, on the atrocities committed by the belligerents, enumerated (and rightly so) and published in 1914. (The year of World War One, by the way.) What is strange is that this book was re-printed in 1993 with an introduction by George Kennan, who said more or less that 80 years have passed since the first publication of this book, and there is no reason to believe that the Balkan people have given up their bad ways or stopped fighting against each other. That is absolutely wrong, because the demise or destruction of Yugoslavia has nothing to do with inter-state wars, which occurred in 1912-13. In fact, there was no war between any two Balkan states in the past 50 or 60 years. The Balkan states were remarkably peaceful toward one another, and have achieved their transition from the communist regime to the present state of affairs with a minimum of bloodshed. Granted, the economies are in shambles. But parliamentary democracy works. The economic field is a different matter. The free market is not working yet as it ought to, neither in Bulgaria nor in Albania. Slowly, Rumania is making good progress, especially with the new government. But, one can say very little about displays of aggression between the states in the Balkans. This particular misperception of the Balkans that a person of the stature of George Kennan displays, is standard for Westerners who want to learn about the Balkans. Instead of picking up a good book like Susan Woodward's, they

read Kaplan's sensational journalism and are immediately convinced that this is a region of congenital barbarism and that nothing can go right.

I object to that; I think much can and will improve, although there are flash points and problems. Kosovo is particularly important. If we manage to put it on the right track, I think things will improve. Not only because of Kosovo in Serbia, but because Kosovo is the tip of the triangle between the two neighboring states, FYROM and Albania.

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ISSN 1435-3288

ISBN 3-933307-09-0

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