

# International Commission calls for Kosovo independence

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The International Commission on the Balkans has published a report that calls for a “shift” in Western policy towards supporting independence for Kosovo. The Report, *The Balkans in Europe’s Future*, also calls for a referendum on the future of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro and a revised federal structure in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The commission is proposing a further division of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into ethnically based statelets. It does so in a region that already suffers from the most malignant consequences of the breakdown of the old nation-state system under the impact of the development of global economy—a development that has unleashed explosive separatist tendencies that have been exploited by the imperialist powers to secure their domination of the Balkans.

Since the end of the US-led war against Serbia, the constituent parts of the former Yugoslavia have suffered a social and economic disaster. Unemployment rates stand at 40 to 70 percent, and wages average just \$100 to \$200 a month. The corrupt governments in the region command little popular support. They are subject to the dictates of international financial institutions and preside over countries run in an essentially colonialist manner by the occupying powers.

The Balkans have become synonymous with prostitution, human trafficking, drugs and weapons smuggling, and money laundering.

The commission says that there is a “real risk of an explosion of Kosovo, an implosion of Serbia and new fractures in the foundations of Bosnia and Macedonia” because the Western powers have “failed to offer a convincing political perspective to the societies in the region.”

As an alternative, the commission says the European Union should draw up a “road map” next year that leads to European Union membership for the Balkan countries by 2014. It hopes this will encourage the Balkan people to accept changes to the constitutional frameworks imposed by the EU and United States during the break up of Yugoslavia.

Incorporating the Balkans into the EU would have the benefit for the European bourgeoisie of helping set a new low benchmark for wages and conditions across the continent. For the Balkan working class, it would mean accepting a right-wing economic programme that requires a rapid “restructuring of public administration and macro-economic adjustments” to satisfy the demands of big business.

A flavour of the future offered by the commission can be seen in

the careers of its 18 members. Most of them have been heavily involved in their own countries in privatisation, structural reform and labour market flexibility programmes that have increased social polarisation and inequality. Among them are the former president of Germany, Richard von Weizsacker, and of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, the former prime minister of Italy, Giuliano Amato, of Sweden, Carl Bildt, of Belgium, Jean-Luc Dehaene, of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zlatko Lagumdžija, and of Albania, Ilir Meta.

The *Economist* once described Amato, who heads the commission and was responsible in 1992 for the biggest budget cuts in Italian history, as “Blairite before [British Prime Minister] Tony Blair.”

Bildt, who served as European co-chair of the 1995 Dayton conference and as the first High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, drastically cut Sweden’s welfare system.

Another commission member is Bruce Jackson, a close associate of the Bush administration and a foreign policy hawk. Jackson is a director of the Project for a New American Century and founder of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, which was set up to help pave the way for Washington’s illegal war of aggression.

The commission was established last year by four organisations—the Robert Bosch Stiftung (Germany), the King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium), the German Marshall Fund (United States) and the foundation set up by General Motors industrialist Charles Stewart Mott—to lobby for closer EU-US co-operation to speed up structural reforms in the Balkans. In particular, it wants the US to reverse its policy of disengagement and become more active, saying, “What the Balkans need most is Washington’s political attention to the problems of the region.”

*The Balkans in Europe’s Future* looks to the US to reassert itself to prop up the fractured system of ethnically based capitalist states in the Balkans by rearranging them or carving out new ones. Not only is this a reactionary proposal in a globalised economy, but the history of the Balkans is bitter testimony to the fact that the creation of such unviable entities is only a means through which the imperialist powers pursue their economic and geopolitical interests in the region.

After the Second World War, US imperialism tolerated the existence of Yugoslavia under Marshall Tito, in part because it could act as a counterweight to the influence and ambitions of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. With the turn towards capitalist restoration under Presidents Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the

US increasingly saw the Titoite bureaucracy's control of the Yugoslav federal state as an obstacle to the rapid privatisation of the economy and bringing it under the direct control of the Western banks and corporations. To speed up the process, support was given to those who advocated dismantling the old state structures, many of whom were promoting ethno-communalism to divert popular opposition to capitalist "reforms," including former stalwarts of the Yugoslavian Communist Party.

Serbia, the dominant power within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), came to be seen as the main obstacle to the establishment of direct Western control over the region—despite the regime of Slobodan Milosevic pursuing pro-capitalist economic policies. When a reunified and assertive Germany pushed the EU to support Croatia's and Slovenia's unilateral secession from the Yugoslav federation, the US wanted to reaffirm its hegemony in the Balkans and seized on Bosnia as a means of doing so, aggressively promoting its "self-determination."

The US and EU, in effect, recognised the former internal borders of the FRY as international ones. But this could not be the end of the matter, for it acted as a cue for the various minorities within these republics to also demand "self-determination." Thus, by supporting secession without negotiating terms with the central government or providing for the rights of minority populations, the US and the other major powers set the stage for the civil wars that followed and the disaster that engulfs the region today.

With the escalating costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, pressure has mounted on the US to reduce its commitments in the Balkans quagmire and get Europe to shoulder the burden.

Kosovo has absorbed vast amounts of aid and resources, in the form of the occupying United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and 17,500 NATO-led troops (of which 1,800 are American). The US ploughed in \$2.8 billion in aid and \$8.2 billion for military purposes in 1999-2003, without much benefit to itself. It is insisting that the EU must pay for reconstruction of the province.

Last year, US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman announced that a review of progress on certain standards—including progress towards a democratic government, a market economy and rights of minorities—would take place in mid-2005 "to begin a process to determine Kosovo's final status," which is still officially part of Serbia and Montenegro.

This "final status" was framed as an attempt to appease both the pro-imperialist ethnic Albanian forces, such as the old Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), that supported efforts by the US and EU to dismantle Yugoslavia, and the pro-Western regime that was installed in Serbia after the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic. According to Security Council Resolution 1244, the settlement involves "substantive autonomy," but also a commitment to "the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia [now Serbia and Montenegro]."

None of the major powers have supported the demand for national independence for Kosovo, although after the effective ethnic cleansing of Serbs by driving them out, Albanians now make up 90 percent of the population. To do so would not merely undermine the previous position that the former Yugoslavia's republican borders must be recognised as permanent international

ones. It would also ignite Albanian nationalist aspirations in ethnic Albanian areas in neighbouring countries such as southern Serbia and Macedonia that have already seen fighting by KLA offshoots. Former KLA leaders also orchestrated the communal violence that erupted in March 2004 in Serb minority areas that resulted in the death of 19 people, eight Kosovo Serbs and eleven Kosovo Albanians and injury to hundreds more. According to Human Rights Watch, Most of the Albanians appear to have been shot by KFOR troops.

The commission says Kosovo should be made independent by next year and embark on a four-stage process to EU accession. Having made concessions towards Albanian demands for independence, however, it says that a Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo (to include parts of Macedonia) is not an option. Those in Serbia who oppose such a move should be told Serbia's own EU membership depends on accepting Kosovo's independence.

*The Balkans in Europe's Future* follows closely the recommendations made in the recent report, *Kosovo: Towards Final Status*. Published by the International Crisis Group, another private strategy organisation, the report says the six-nation contact group (preferably including Russia) should make it clear that "neither Kosovo's return to Belgrade's rule, nor its partition, nor any possible unification of Kosovo with Albania or any neighbouring state or territory will be supported."

It said independence should be recognised by the US and EU and implemented regardless of any objections by either Moscow or Belgrade, which should be told "the train is leaving with or without you."

The commission's proposals, another attempt by Western imperialism at crisis management of a situation that is out of control, do not offer a viable alternative for the Balkan people.

The Marxist movement has sought to overcome the misery and barbarism that capitalism and nationalism have created in the region by fighting for the unification of the entire working class in a socialist federation of the Balkans. Only this perspective can provide the economic and political framework for meeting the social and democratic aspirations of Serb, Albanian, Croat and Moslem workers and create the basis for a struggle against both the region's chauvinist demagogues and criminals and the imperialist powers.



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