



# KOSOVO

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## The Kosovo test

By Ian Bancroft, The Guardian

[http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/ian\\_bancroft/2007/11/the\\_kosovo\\_test.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/ian_bancroft/2007/11/the_kosovo_test.html)

Strengthening the European Union's foreign and security policy requires an approach to the western Balkans, in particular Kosovo, that more accurately reflects contemporary understandings of autonomy and sovereignty.

Talks about the status of Kosovo are scheduled to end on December 10, and the Troika of Russia, the EU and the US will report back to the UN secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon. Several EU members oppose the independence for Kosovo that the US strongly supports, while Russia is promising to veto any imposed settlement. Should Kosovo Albanians unilaterally declare independence on or after December 10, the ramifications would be felt not only in the western Balkans, but within the EU's own borders and beyond.

As the European Security Strategy concluded in 2003, the credibility the EU's foreign policy "depends on the consolidation of our achievements" in the Balkans. In order to prevent further losses of credibility, Europe to clearly define the core of its fledgling Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). To do so, the EU must look inwards and project externally those innovations in autonomy and sovereignty that have facilitated the evolution of the European model.

After its failure to contend with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the EU's CFSP is once more challenged by events in the region. Speaking about collective security failures in the early 1990s, Chris Patten, the former EU Commissioner for External Relations, observed: "As Yugoslavia broke into bits, Europe was largely impotent because it was not united. Some member states wanted to keep Yugoslavia together at all costs, some wanted to manage its break-up, and others still felt we should stay out of the whole mess."

These words remain apt with respect to Kosovo. Several EU member states, particularly Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Romania and Slovakia refuse to endorse even conditional independence, each fearing that the precedent established will have damaging implications for their own internal politics. For instance, the Basques and Catalans in Spain, Cyprus and its unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and Romania and Slovakia with their respective Hungarian minorities. While the notion of "constructive abstention" in the EU Council of Ministers bypasses the stated need for unity in EU foreign policy matters, these divisions undermine the power of Europe's voice. The absence of a UN security council resolution on Kosovo's independence will only ferment further dissent and division.



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These European divisions have already been exploited by Russia to re-emphasise the negative repercussions a pro-independence decision could have on the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia and Moldova's breakaway region of Transdnistria. Though Russia's stance is motivated more by geopolitical, regional and domestic considerations, and despite the repeated insistence by diplomats that Kosovo is a unique case without future precedent, it is difficult to see how independence will do anything other than fuel greater tension throughout the region. As Eastern Europe becomes an ever greater sphere of interest for the EU, its ability to mediate conflicts there will be affected by the decisions it takes with respect to Kosovo.

Regionally, there are fears that a pro-independence decision will further destabilise the western Balkans, most notably the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRM), where tensions between the Albanian and Macedonian communities continue to escalate in spite of the widely touted 2001 Ohrid Agreement, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While diplomats continue to insist that Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are separate issues, with Bosnia and Herzegovina's High Representative, Miroslav Lajcak, dismissing the artificial linking of the two, a pro-independence decision will only serve to antagonise the questions of autonomy and self-determination in the western Balkans, with serious implications for regional stability and security. The claim that Kosovo is the last unresolved territorial issue in the western Balkans may prove somewhat aspirational. Having played a decisive role in the birth of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), as major element of the CFSP, the western Balkans could instead now play a crucial role in its demise.

According to Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for the CFSP, the CFSP "is about the European Union being able to project its values and its interests, the core of its political identity, effectively beyond its own borders". The development of the EU is marked by a number of integrative innovations that have redefined and challenged prevailing understandings of sovereignty and autonomy. Parallel to Europe's integration and the spread of the idea of "Europeanisation" has been the growth of regionalism throughout Europe; of a "Europe of the Regions", of "Unity in Diversity". Throughout the evolution of the EU, regions and regional policy have been central to promoting greater social, political and economic cohesion, underpinned by the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and necessity. The European Economic Area Agreement, meanwhile, which allows Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein to participate in the EU's internal market while not being member states, highlights the flexibility of the EU to establish integrative relationships with outside parties.

If the EU's CFSP is to be an external projection of the "core of its political identity" as Solana insists, then it is the EU's capacity for innovation in accommodating and



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integrating diversity that must be projected "effectively beyond its own borders". Only then can Europe galvanise support among its member states, particularly those with legitimate and understandable concerns about the precedent of independence for their own territorial integrity, and build a platform from which to mediate in future conflicts.

With respect to Kosovo, discussions over independence must be replaced by discussions over broad autonomy and special relations with the EU - including the deployment of a ESDP Mission to assist "in the development of effective, fair and representative rule of law institutions" - thereby reaffirming the EU's commitment to complex, multiple layers of shared and limited sovereignty.

Applying these principles with respect to Kosovo will reinforce peace and stability throughout the region, while reinforcing the fatigue-threatened enlargement process. Though the countries of the western Balkans remain prospective members of the EU, the lure of membership itself is insufficient to make people and politicians forget or ignore the issues of autonomy and self-determination. Supporting Kosovo's independence from Serbia while concurrently insisting that both have a common European future seems somewhat contradictory and inconsistent. In the absence of a security council resolution granting independence, a unilateral declaration by Kosovo Albanians would have to be recognised by countries on a bilateral basis. As such, Kosovo's status would remain in limbo; recognised by some, but not by others.

What events relating to Kosovo have highlighted is the prevailing weakness of the EU's CFSP. Divisions over the status of Kosovo have undermined this crucial aspect of the European project, further damaging the reputation of the EU in foreign affairs. If the EU is to avoid the impotency of which Chris Patten speaks, then it must define its foreign policy in terms of the "core of its political identity". In this sense, Kosovo has the potential to be a defining issue for Europe's CFSP. If Europe is to reassert itself as a credible global player, then its CFSP must reflect and project those integrative innovations in autonomy and sovereignty that have defined and facilitated the evolution of the European model. In relation to Kosovo, this means advocating broad autonomy and a special relationship with the EU. Decisions taken over Kosovo will go a long way to determining whether a CFSP for Europe is an aspiration or reality, rhetorical or active, symbolic or explicit.