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Articles

Yugoslavia: Kosovo and the Dizdarevic Report

A report to the Yugoslav Federal Assembly by its President, Raif Dizdarevic, has exacerbated differences among Yugoslav leaders over the explosive situation in Kosovo. Most leaders worry that unrest among the largely Moslem population of Kosovo may both reinforce and feed off growing pan-Islamic sentiment in Bosnia-Hercegovina and southern Serbia. The emotions raised by the dispute could frustrate Federal efforts to find a political solution to the Kosovo issue.

Continuing Ferment in Kosovo

The problem in Kosovo, the "autonomous province" of Serbia populated largely by ethnic Albanians, remains a problem second in importance only to the country's economic decline. Kosovar riots in the spring of 1981, followed by smaller disturbances a year later, have led to a continuing debate among the leadership—and in Yugoslavia's lively press—over how to mollify the ethnic tensions

Since the 1981 riots, there have been increasing reports of anti-Serb acts by Kosovo's Albanian majority. The Serbian press—apparently with the explicit approval of Dragoslav Markovic, Serbia's leading member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) Presidium—has reported verbal intimidation, beatings, rapes of Serbian women by Albanians, and desecrations of Orthodox and Catholic cemeteries. Although some of these stories probably are exaggerated, feelings are running high among Kosovo's ethnic groups, and the exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins from the province has caused concern elsewhere in Yugoslavia. In October provincial leaders admitted



Raif Dizdarevic, President of the Assembly of Yugoslavia Eastfoto ©

15,000 to 20,000 Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins—about 10 percent of those minorities in Kosovo—have left the province since March 1981

The Dizdarevic Report

In October, Federal Assembly President Raif Dizdarevic, an ethnic Moslem reportedly sympathetic to Moslem national assertiveness in his home province of Bosnia-Hercegovina, led a delegation of Assembly members to Kosovo to investigate.

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[redacted] Dizdarevic subsequently filed a report exonerating Kosovo Albanians and blaming local Serbs and Montenegrins for provoking violence and bloodshed. [redacted] Dizdarevic in addition asserted that the Serbian-Montenegrin exodus has been caused by the region's extreme poverty, rather than by any alleged Albanian mistreatment. Privately, Dizdarevic [redacted] believes the Kosovo situation has improved over the last year. [redacted]

The Dizdarevic report drew hostile reactions from leading Serbs. The Belgrade daily *Borba*—sometimes accused by non-Serbs of being a mouthpiece for Serbian leaders—reported that Serbian State President and former Defense Minister Ljubicic rejected Dizdarevic's position. [redacted]

Ljubicic had previously taken a milder stand on Albanian rights within Serbia, perhaps to gain support from Kosovo party members against Markovic in their rivalry for primacy within Serbia. The Dizdarevic report, however, apparently forced Ljubicic to stress his Serbian bona fides. Markovic is likely to sense his advantage on the issue and probably can be counted on to continue fanning Serbian anger. [redacted]

Press reports of Kosovo ethnic tensions proliferated after the Dizdarevic affair. On 18 November the Belgrade daily *Politika* published a new Federal Assembly resolution supporting the rights of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo, and urging that efforts be made to permit their return to the province. The next day *Borba* reported that Serbian delegates to the Federal Assembly, citing Ljubicic's views, engaged Dizdarevic in open polemics. On 30 November *Tanjug*, the national news agency, reported new desecrations in Serbian Orthodox and Albanian Catholic cemeteries in Prizren. [redacted]

Kosovar leaders have continued to balance public criticism of Albanian irredentism and Serbian chauvinism. Ali Sukrija, an Albanian and Kosovo's representative on the Federal Party Presidium, complained



Gen. Nikola Ljubicic,
Minister of National Defense

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of both problems in a 26 December interview with the Belgrade weekly *NIN*. On 4 January *Tanjug* reported that Asem Vlasi, an Albanian member of the Kosovo Party Presidium, urged that Yugoslavs not assign blame for the exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo because it was not clear whether this emigration was caused by economic or political pressures. [redacted]

Problems for Other Leaders

Stane Dolanc, a leading Slovenian Communist and currently the federal Interior Minister, is likely to get caught in this dispute. Dolanc, known for his "Yugoslav," nonparticularist outlook, is likely to resent efforts by Markovic and other Serbs to publicize Albanian-Serbian tensions. He has told US Embassy officers that (like Dizdarevic) he believes that the Kosovo situation has improved somewhat over the last year. Dolanc reportedly does not believe that Kosovo's problems can be solved through military occupation and repression, and is impatient with the cost—\$22 million annually according to his estimate—of the police and military needed to keep peace in the province. Military leaders probably also hope to reduce the Army's presence in Kosovo, which they view largely as a drain on the recently reduced military budget. [redacted]

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Stane Dolanc,
Member, Presidency LCY

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[REDACTED] Petar Stambolic, a Serb and currently president of the collective Yugoslav State Presidency, believes that the "elite mud-slinging" over Kosovo will continue and could frustrate efforts to achieve even a semblance of stability in the province. Stambolic reportedly refused to attend the recent celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation because Dizdarevic gave the keynote address [REDACTED]

Outlook

The increasing use of Kosovo as a political football by leading Yugoslavs will further complicate efforts to relax tensions and manage Serbian-Kosovar relations. By appealing to Serbian nationalism through the press, Markovic seems to have set back Ljubicic's effort to pose as a moderate on the Albanian question. Dizdarevic's use of his important federal position to become a spokesman for Moslem rights is likely to annoy many non-Moslems, particularly leaders such as Dolanc. Some non-Serbs may be pleased with Dizdarevic's opposition to greater Serb control over Kosovo, on the general theory that any stick in the wheels of Serbian nationalism is useful. [REDACTED]

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