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THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, NH 03755

WM-13  
EUROPE/RUSSIA

Whitney Mason is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

## The Kosovo Turks Part 2\*

# Twilight of an Ottoman Time Capsule?

By Whitney Mason

### Prefatory Note:

*This will be the last newsletter I write that is a rather rambling account of my own process of discovery. Since many readers have made it clear that they'd prefer me to cut to the chase, from now on I plan to write either tightly structured stories of the sort you'd expect to find in a news magazine or polemical essays illustrated with anecdotes.*

*But before I retire the approach I've taken in most of my newsletters so far, I'd like to invite readers to consider what I regard as its two singular virtues. First, it reveals the reporting process that generates the writer's conclusions. By including long, sometime contradictory quotes and providing a sense of how and why those people have been interviewed rather than others, the "rambling" style — unlike the carefully controlled magazine piece — gives skeptical readers the tools to second-guess the writer.*

*The second virtue of this style, particularly for subjects in flux like the Turks in Kosovo, is that it is true to the ambiguities and uncertainties of the world as it really is in a way a neatly packaged story, by its very nature, can not be.*

*For those readers who know now that they are not interested in following my ramblings one last time, herewith a thumbnail sketch of the most striking discoveries I made during several days in Prizren, a large Turkish-speaking town in southern Kosovo:*

- The community of several thousand who consider themselves Turks, whose roots go back to the beginning of Ottoman settlement in Kosovo in the late fourteenth century, is now teetering on the brink of extinction. Since the NATO airstrikes in the spring of 1999 forced Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic to remove his security forces, vengeful Albanians have driven virtually all Serbs out of the province. Though the Turkish Kosovars say they will not suffer the same fate, they are clearly beleaguered by Albanians who feel the Turks betrayed the Albanians during their struggle against Milosevic. Neither international observers in Kosovo nor Turkish diplomats are willing to bet on whether or not the Turks will survive. My visit afforded a rare opportunity to see a centuries-old community at a vital crossroads, before their ultimate fate was clear.

- The fact that the Turks may be pressured to leave Kosovo by Albanians, who are mostly fellow Muslims, argues against the popular theory promulgated by Samuel Huntington that today's conflicts will be defined by a "clash of civilizations." In fact,

\*Correction: In Part 1, "The Spotted Owls of Kosovo: The Kosovo Turks": The caption on page 6 should read: Ekrem Karaoglu's younger brother Adnan hopes he will return to Kosovo and wrest some power from the bigger community of Turks living in the south of the province. The caption on page 7 should read: Adnan Karaoglu with his son Sancar and journalist Ercan Kasap (center) who used to direct the Turkish service of Kosovo state radio in Pristina.

*"civilizational" considerations represent only a fraction of the innumerable variables that determine the course of conflicts.*

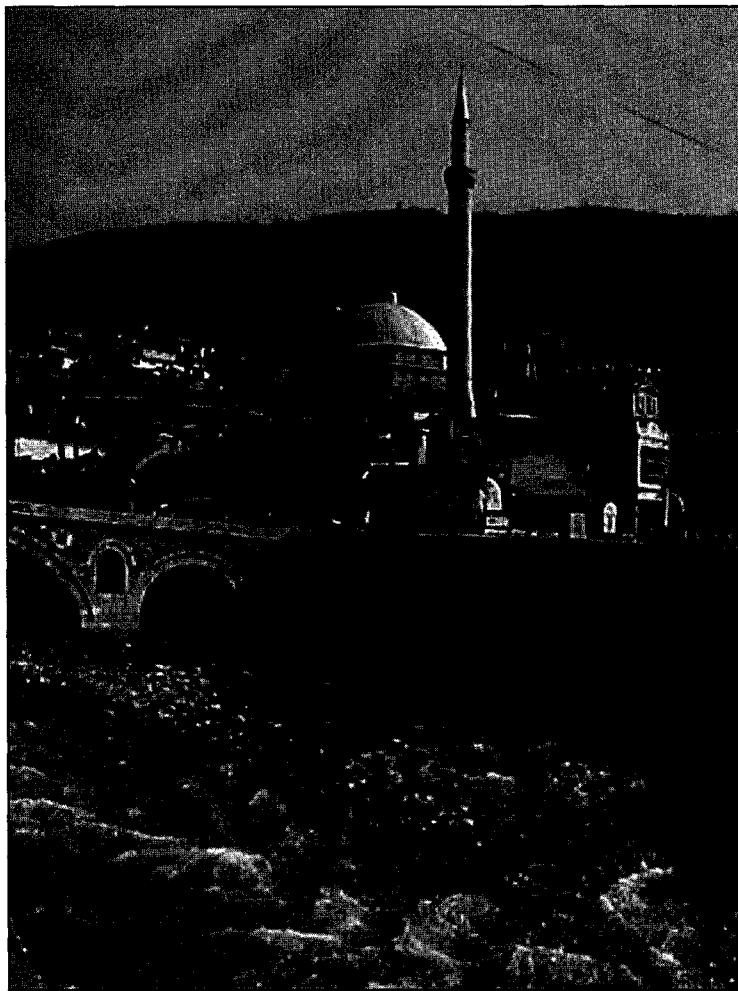
• *Albanians accuse the Turks of "collaborating" with the Milosevic regime by not abandoning state institutions — especially schools — after the Albanians were expelled from these institutions in 1991. The Turks, in turn, argue that as a vulnerable minority group, they merely tried to remain neutral in the Serb-Albanian conflict. Their reversal of fortunes reinforces the observation that after a political conflict turns violent, neutrality becomes practically impossible.*

• *The Turks might yet be able to save themselves if they could bring themselves to apologize to the Albanians for not having been more supportive during the conflict. But, as a Turkish diplomat told me, apologizing is alien to Turkish culture. It's an extraordinary comment on Turkishness that the Turkish community in Kosovo may effectively prefer death to saying sorry and that the community may disappear because of an insuperable quirk of culture.*

*And now, for those interested in more...*

After a few days in Pristina and Mitrovica I was now heading south — along with my old colleague and housemate from Sarajevo, Turkish TV reporter Serif Turgut and her cameraman and driver — away from the "action." We were headed toward Prizren, a beautiful old town that was relatively undamaged by the NATO airstrikes and Serb reprisals in the spring of 1999. It was also an Ottoman anachronism stubbornly clinging to the multiculturalism that had been so savagely repudiated by the Balkans' recent history. Most of the Kosovars who identify themselves as Turks — officially numbered at just 12,000 — lived in Prizren or the nearby all-Turkish

village of Mamusha. Everyone in the town, Albanians, Turks and Bosniacs (Serbian-speaking Muslims) spoke Turkish in addition to their own languages. But many Turks had told me that the Albanian nationalism that had swept over Kosovo after Slobodan Milosevic removed his security forces appeared to leave little tolerance for other nationalities — even Turks, who like most Albanians, are Muslim. I was going to Prizren to assess the Turkish community's chances of survival and to try to get an idea, from this numerically minuscule group, of the dynamics of Balkan identity politics on the cusp of a new millennium.



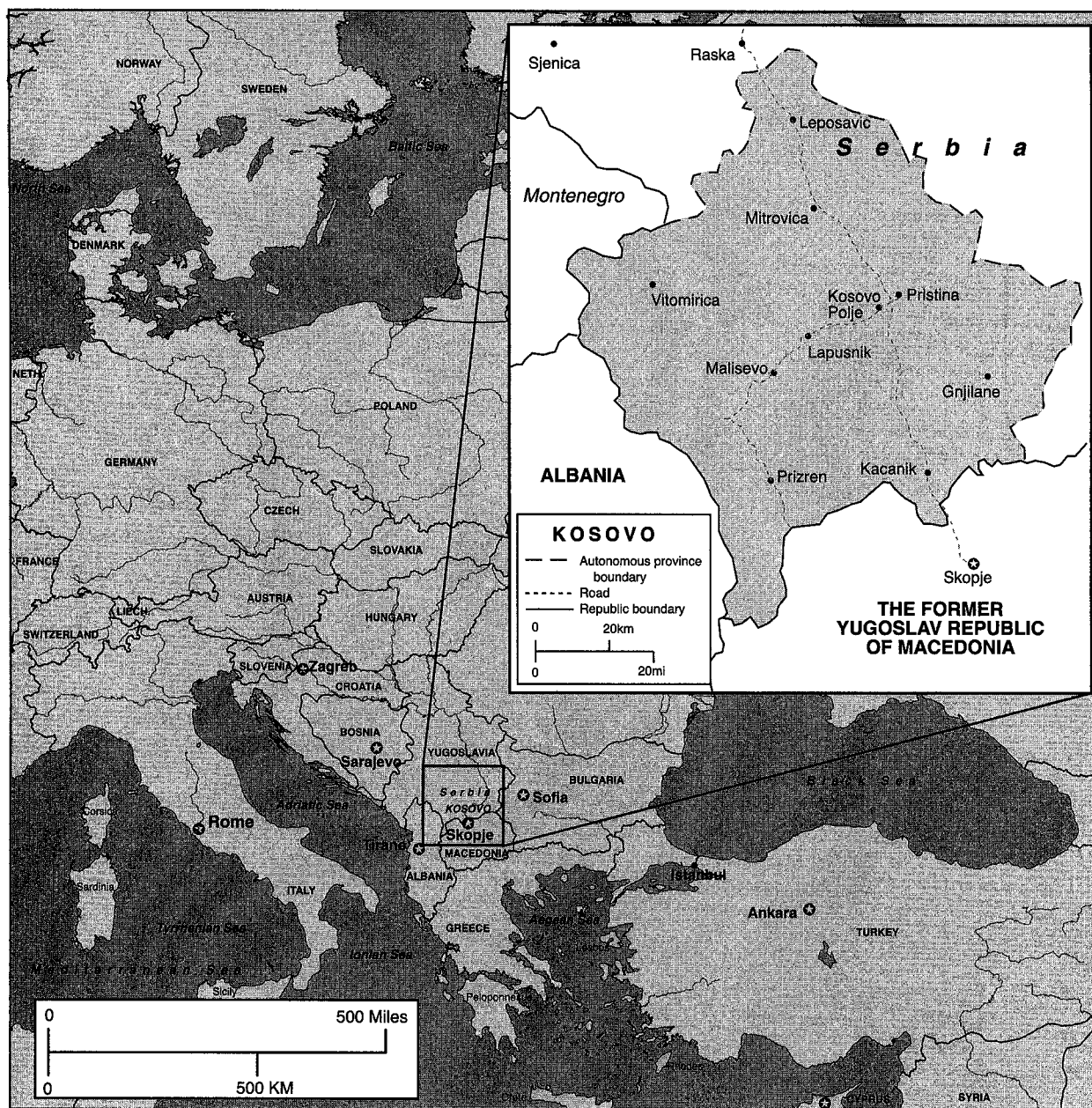
*From this distance, Prizren looks idyllic.*

The morning sun gleamed on the toy-like onion-domes of Orthodox churches guarded by soldiers from the sub-arctic Edens of Scandinavia and Canada. Everyone in Kosovo knew that if these fair-haired boys weren't there, angry Albanians would soon reduce these temples to blackened shells. At every road junction hunkered single tanks with pale young faces sticking out the top hatch. As we drove, Serif and I reviewed post-war Turkish vocabulary that would be useful in my interviews of Turkish-speaking Kosovars over the next couple of days: fight, surround, massacre, victim, refugee.

We passed the turn off for Mamusha and Serif recalled a story about an old man in the village who remembered seeing the Ottoman army pull out in 1912 and was alive to see it return in 1999. When the senior Turkish officer presented himself to the patriarch, the man cried and kissed the Turkish flag.

Then the old man squinted his eyes, scrutinizing the side of the officer's shoulder for an indication of rank. "Shame on you!" he scolded the officer. "You don't even have a star." Ottoman rank insignia had been on the shoulder, whereas modern ranks are indicated by shoulder boards.

When the Turkish officer explained that he was in fact a colonel, the old man was relieved to hear that Turkey cared enough about what was happening in Kosovo to send a detachment



under someone of stature. "I always knew you'd return," the old man said, "and now I feel free to die." Two weeks later he did.

We arrived in Prizren and parked on the side of a road running along one of those wild mountain rivers that tear through so many Balkan towns, sounding a continuous note of anarchy within citadels of civilization. As soon as we began to walk, a woman with a small child in tow, seeing we were strangers, asked in Turkish whether she could help us. Serif explained that she was a journalist for ATV in Turkey there to do a report on conditions and feelings in Prizren. The woman, like all Turkish-speakers I met in Kosovo, recognized Serif with a smile. "It's hard," the woman said. "There are no factories, no work."

"But it's much less destroyed than other towns in  
Institute of Current World Affairs

Kosovo," Serif said encouragingly.

"Oh yes, we're softer here," agreed the woman, reasonably taking some credit for the town's relatively good condition. The woman described the townfolks' condition with a word that translates as "bruised."

We walked along a low stone wall built as a kind of battlement against the river below. In Turkish it's called "Beyaz Nehir," the White River. [In Albanian it's the Lumbardh, in Serbian the Bisdricka.] The White River ran in the direction of a single snow-clad peak, Pashtrik Mountain, rising nearly 2,000 meters to the west of Prizren on the Albanian frontier. On its far side we saw a line of once-elegant homes, now gutted. We learned later that these houses had belonged to Serbs and were looted and torched as soon as the Serbian strongman, Slobodan Milosevic, pulled out his police force in line

with NATO demands in June 1999.

Crossing an ancient stone bridge (which I learned later in Roman times had been a vital link in the Via Ignatia traversing the Balkans), we entered a square so picturesque it could have been taken from a propaganda film extolling the simple beauty of Ottoman life. Four roads, closed to vehicles, led into the square, which was bordered on two sides by cafes with outside tables and on another by the handsome hulk of the Sinan Pasha Mosque. To the left of the churches loomed the ramparts of the Roman city of Theranda, the embryo of modern Prizren. The center of the square was adorned by a water fountain with several jets of what people told me was "some of the purest water in Kosovo." The fountain gave the square its mellifluous Turkish name, the "shadirvan."



*Teenagers flirting on Prizren's main square, the Shadirvan, reinforced the illusion that the town was at peace.*

After drinking espressos on the shadirvan Serif and her crew headed out of town to try to get the usually tight-lipped Turkish army to talk to them on camera, leaving me alone. After savoring another coffee I walked up the hill to look for the office of True Path, Prizren's main Turkish cultural organization (no relation to the Turkish political party of the same name.) In the club's main room 20 or 30 people were watching a Turkish football match on a big TV. I asked where I might find the chairman, Ferhat Dervish, and was led to a small office where several men were talking

around a desk. I introduced myself, explaining that I lived in Istanbul and was travelling with Serif, whom they all knew, and that I'd come to look into the situation of the Turkish community. They responded as if they'd been anticipating me: That evening at 7, they said, I should come to a concert organized by the Turkish community and the next day to a meeting of minority groups in Prizren, basically Turks with a few Bosniacs (Serbian-speaking Muslims) thrown in. For some reason I mentioned that I was reading Noel Malcolm's *Short History of*

*Kosovo* and asked what they thought of it. One man with a bird-like face waved his hand dismissively. "He diminishes how long Turks have been in Kosovo," he said. "He says they came with the Ottomans. But what were the Huns and the Bulgars? Turks!" Uhuh, I thought to myself: in contrast to the Ottomans, who classified people by religion, these Turks shared the same mythologized and tribal notion of identity as their Balkan neighbors.

### Police Raid

By the time I'd decided to stay the night, bought essential toiletries and checked into the Theranda Hotel, it was three o'clock and I was starving. Following the advice of a young man in the shadirvan, I walked to a place called the Alhambra on the corner of the street with the Serbs' burned-out houses. I took a small table facing the door, and ordered the waiter's recommendation of goulash. The soup took longer than expected and when it finally arrived I attacked it eagerly. After three or four spoonfuls of the rich stew, I



*Serif doing her standup for the evening news back in Turkey. Serif says that during the NATO airstrikes, when she was one of just a couple of journalists who never left Kosovo, she felt a special sense of responsibility, knowing that her reports were being followed by thousands of Turkish-speaking Kosovars.*



heard yelling and looked up into the barrel of a machine gun held by a man in camouflage fatigues and a black balaklava.

"Down, down, everybody down!" the masked gunman yelled in heavily accented English. A dozen more identically clad, machine-gun-wielding men, running as if they were themselves afraid of being shot at, fanned out through the restaurant. By the second scream to get down I was sitting on the floor below my table. To the extent I'd had time to think anything, I imagined that the masked men just wanted us to be low enough to avoid being caught in a firefight. "Face down!" the man nearest me screamed. Needless to say, I complied, flattening myself on the ground, my eyes on the swamp-colored carpet an inch or two from my nose.

My problem at this point, besides the fact that my stomach was growling while my tasty lunch cooled above me, was that I didn't know who these masked gunmen were. The Kosovo Liberation Army? Serb paramilitaries? "Our" team? After a couple of minutes on the floor I heard an American voice from the door and breathed more easily. Sometime later one of the masked men called out that they were with KFOR (Kosovo Force) police.

"Don't put your hands near your pockets," the American said in an affectedly low-key voice pulled straight out of a '70s cop show. "It makes my men nervous." My own hands were spread out above my head,

one of them just inches from a chair that the masked men kept moving. It occurred to me that it would be easy for them to break my fingers, which would lead to my crying out in a startling manner, which would undoubtedly make the gunmen dangerously nervous. Moving slowly, I pulled both hands toward my face and rested my cheek on my laced fingers. After apparently securing the restaurant, the American began going from person to person demanding identification. The process went slowly and after five minutes or so I turned my head a little and said, as loudly as seemed prudent, that I was American. Since I didn't want to risk alarming anyone by raising my voice, I had to repeat this several times over the next 15 minutes or so without any response until finally I heard the American voice asking, "So you say we've got an American here?"

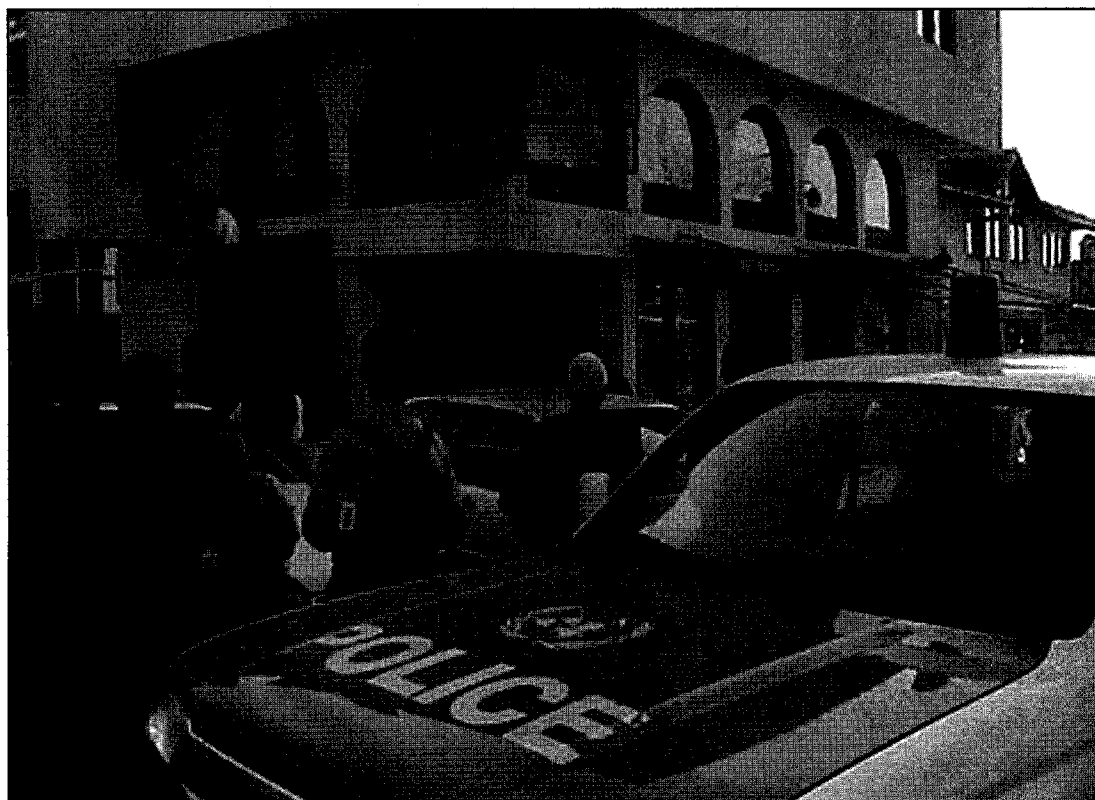
"Right here!" I said and started — foolishly — to look up. "Keep your head down!" one of the SWAT team barked in a voice edged with fear.

"You have ID?" the American voice asked from directly above me.

"Yes," I answered, even as I remembered that I had nothing indicating my citizenship.

"Passport?" the voice asked.

"No, my passport is at the Grand Hotel in Pristina.



*Outside the Alhambra restaurant, where I was pinned under my table as a UN police assault team searched for —and found — an Albanian Kosovar who had murdered someone the night before.*

They made me leave it there," I said.

"You should have made a copy," he said.

"Sorry."

"What are you doing in Kosovo?" asked the American.

"I'm a journalist," I answered — a bit inaccurately, as I later realized.

"You have a KFOR Press card?"

I didn't. "I thought about getting one," I said, "but I didn't bother because I hadn't planned to be in a militarized zone today."

"This whole place is a militarized zone," he said. "Got any ID proving you're a journalist?" the American voice asked as he slipped my wallet out of my hip pocket.

"I lost my wallet a few months ago and with it my driver's license and my press card," I said, trying to keep my voice cheerful to imply that all was not lost. "But you'll find a business Visa card that says 'Institute of World...', which is short for the foundation of which I'm a fellow, The Institute of Current World Affairs."

After scrutinizing the contents of my wallet for a minute or so he ordered me to get up. "Welcome to Kosovo," the regulation-shorthaired-and-mustached American policeman said with a justified touch of theatricality. He handed me my wallet and directed me toward a table in the corner where the only other unmasked policeman had pitched a temporary office.

"I'm sorry for the trouble," said the man, a German. "We're looking for a murder suspect who works here." The assault team, he explained politely in answer to my questions, were Germans based in Pristina, the Americans investigators based in Prizren. "Now please leave," he said.

Outside the restaurant stood a tall, redheaded policeman with an American flag stitched on his shoulder who introduced himself as Pat McNulty. "The murder was last night, execution-style," he told me. "Nothing political, just a dispute between two groups of young people. But some people think that there's a vacuum of authority so they can get away with anything. We're here to try to send the message that criminals will be caught and punished."

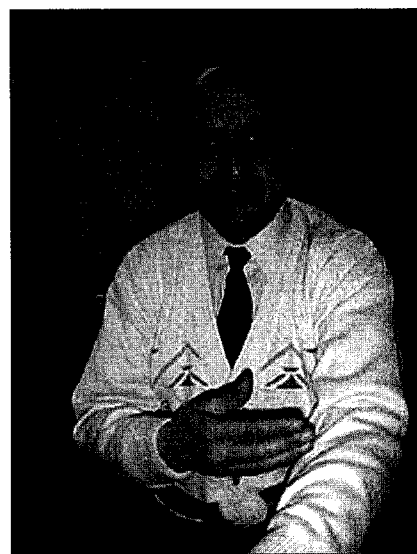
## Divided They Fall

Still hungry, I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to set up appointments around town. That evening before Serif, Bashar and Ali Baba returned to Pristina to await possible outbreaks of telegenic violence somewhere

in Kosovo, the three of us walked over to the cultural center for the concert being put on by the Turkish community. Half the town seemed to be milling around outside, with Turkish soldiers providing security. Inside the packed hall, a soldier who recognized Serif from television insisted she take his seat. One folk group performing at the concert, Ayildizlar, was celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The succession of crooners we watched for the next hour reminded me of good entrants in a school talent show. The more I saw of the Turkish community, in fact, the more it reminded me of a proud old school determined to keep up standards more than a beleaguered national minority.

What would become of the alma mater of dozens of Ottoman Grand Viziers depended largely on the intra-national minuet being performed these days by local politicians. To get an overview of who might be stepping on

*Mehmet Butuc, editor of a new Turkish language paper financed primarily by USAID, says all political parties in Kosovo are deeply flawed.*

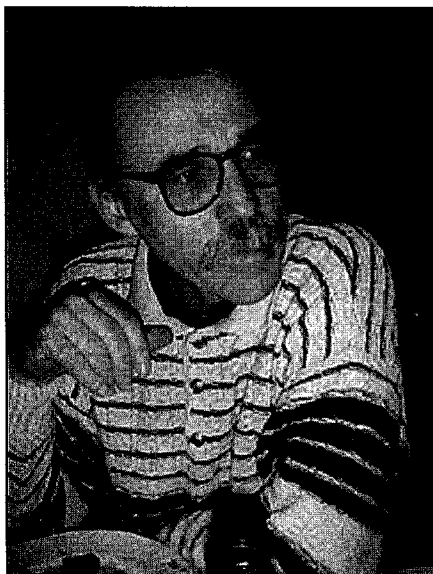


whose toes, I headed to the office of Mehmet Butuc, editor of a local weekly Turkish-language paper supported by USAID called *New Thought*. I found New Thought's editorial room in a nondescript cubbyhole off a narrow street in the center, looking more like a cheap realty office than a bastion of multiculturalism. (But it had access to more resources than met the eye: when a generator supplied by USAID broke, Turkish KFOR soldiers supplied a huge one from their base.)

"We know zero about democracy," Butuc said with a smile after offering the traditional cup of Nescafe. "We've never lived it. First we had communism, then fascism. Now we're like children taking our first steps."

"We're Kosovars," said Butuc. "This is our homeland. Albanians and Bosnians must also say the Turks are Kosovars. At the same time, the new generation of Turks must express their sorrow for the sufferings of their Albanian brothers and sisters. No one needs chauvinism in Kosovo — least of all the Turks."

Neither party has had close relations with the Turk-



*Ferhat Dervish, president of the Turkish cultural organization, True Path, displays a whining self-interested demeanor that prompted one international official to call him a "dumbfuck nationalist."*

ish community. "No party is healthy now — there should be a moratorium on them until we've recovered our balance," said Butuc. "Every party in Kosovo has its weakness — [former KLA leader Hashim] Thaci depends on the mafia, [publisher] Suroj on the Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros. If the Turkish Democratic Union leaders are not replaced by people from the new generation, the party will have no future." On the other hand, said Butuc, "Turks now have big potential to be a bridge between our Albanian brothers and Turkey. Turks are well educated. Seven or eight of them could serve in parliament as experts — not as 'Turkish' experts but as Kosovars. What we need in our administration is quality. Before, people had a quota mentality — the Albanians dominated, since they were the majority, and a couple of Turks would be thrown into subordinate positions."

I asked him about Albanian criticism of the Turkish Democratic Union for having collaborated with the Milosevic regime. Butuc said it was true that a Kosovar Turk named Zenel Abidid Kureysh had accompanied the Serbian delegation to Rambouillet while claiming to be neutral. But he said very few Turks — just five or six people — directly supported Milosevic. By contrast, lots of Bosniacs — Serbian-speaking Muslims — had served in the Serbs' paramilitary units and police; not one Turk had. Butuc said that even some Catholic Albanians involved in the narcomafia had served in the Serb paramilitary units to protect their business. On the other hand, said Butuc, only 15 or 16 Turks who were married to Albanians fought with the KLA against the Serbs. Sezair Shaipi, leader of the Turkish People's Party and the Turks' lone representative on the governing council of UN Administrator Bernard Kouchner, was probably the only

Turk who had gone to the extreme of actually supporting the KLA.

Ferhat Dervish and Sezair Shaipi were the odd couple who incarnated why 500 years of Turkish history in Kosovo might end in self-destruction by sheer pig-headedness. Dervish, a vocal Pollyanna, chairman of the True Path culture club and a stalwart of the Turkish Democratic Union, was the Felix Unger of the pair — a bloodhound's drooping face atop a rake-thin frame, unabashedly self-serving, whining about the rights of his tiny community. Shaipi, with his pugnacious bulldog's mug was the Oscar Madison — a loyal ally of the Kosovo Liberation Army who had served four and a half years in prison for opposing the Milosevic regime. Dervish's Turkish Democratic Union had the support of virtually all Turks who involved themselves in politics. Rumor had it that Shaipi, on the other hand, had practically no support in the Turkish community but he had something more relevant in realpolitik terms — the support of the KLA and thanks to it, the Turks' only seat on the ruling council of UN Administrator Bernard Kouchner.

The only time they could meet me was the same evening and so I had to see the two of them back to back and hope that we didn't cross paths. Dervish and I met at the True Path office and walked back to a kebab place on the shadirvan where by this time I'd become a regular. As we ate sausages and drank beer beneath the glare of fluorescent lights, Dervish told me the Turkish community today faced greater discrimination than before 1951.<sup>1</sup>

Like several other Turks I'd talked with, Dervish's

*Sezair Shaipi, president of the Turkish People's Party, may also be its only member. But his good relations with Albanian nationalists earned him the Turkish community's only spot on the UN council governing Kosovo.*



<sup>1</sup> It was in that year that Belgrade had encouraged Kosovars to identify themselves as "Turks" by declaring them a national minority and opening Turkish schools; the number of Kosovars identifying themselves as Turkish jumped from 1,315 in the 1948 census to 34,583 in 1953. After Yugoslavia signed a treaty with Greece and Turkey, large-scale immigration by Kosovars to Turkey suggested that the Yugoslavs had encouraged Turkishness as a way to rid the country of as many Muslim Kosovars — Albanian or Turkish — as possible.

main complaint was that Turkish no longer appeared on official documents, such as birth and marriage forms, as it had from 1974 until the system broke down amid the NATO air war. "If this situation continues," he pronounced dramatically, "Turkish will die in Kosovo." He told me that Prizren had four primary schools that taught exclusively in Turkish. "But if Turkish isn't an official language, in ten years the schools will stop and Turks will be assimilated."

What "assimilation" might mean is not as clear as it might at first appear. As I've suggested before, identity in Kosovo is not only mercurial, but voluntaristic. Dervish himself, who like most Kosovar Turks is married to someone who identifies herself as Albanian, illustrated the point. "I'm married to an Albanian," he told me, "but we speak Turkish among ourselves and my sons are Turks."

"If their mother is Albanian, then they're only half-Turkish," I ventured.

"No, they are Turks," he thundered as forcefully as his thin frame would allow. "They were raised as Turks!"

Funny: though Dervish had mentioned his wife being Albanian to prove his broad-mindedness, he ended up only revealing himself as a narrow-minded chauvinist. I understood then why one senior international official had described Dervish as a "dumbfuck nationalist."

Several international officials had suggested that the Turkish Democratic Union could have much better relations with the Albanian community if they apologized for cooperating with the Milosevic regime, as had the Serbian-speaking Muslim mountain people known as Goranis. I asked Dervish whether an apology might be on the cards. "There's nothing to apologize for," said Dervish. "Radio Prizren asked me to apologize to the Albanian community and I refused because I helped much more than many Albanians. I was taken to the police station during the NATO bombing! I suffered more than many!"<sup>2</sup>

Dervish claimed he'd left the TDB in '92 because it

had become too pro-Milosevic and that same year he was offered a promotion if he'd go along with the regime; when he refused, he was fired from his job as head of the cultural center in Prizren. "The Serbs' aim was always to be as close as possible to Turkey. But we were always against Milosevic. In meetings I used to criticize him openly. The Yugoslav ambassador to Ankara visited Prizren in '97 and asked what the Turkish community's problem was. We told him we accepted the state, but not the regime," said Dervish. "If you continue like this, we won't support your state, either."

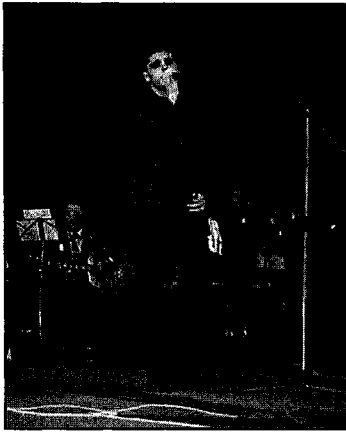
The dilemma for Turks, Dervish said, was that during the conflict between the Albanians and the Milosevic regime, they didn't know who would win. Naturally they wanted to keep their options open. "My aim is just to support the Turkish nation. If people were under Milosevic, that could be OK," Dervish said, belying his previous claims to be a fearless foe of the Belgrade regime. Turks have a point that their vulnerability as a minority makes their policy of neutrality understandable; Albanians also have a point that when the chips were down, the Turks looked after themselves and never demonstrated such fraternal devotion to the Albanian community as they now claim to feel. This is the crux of the Turks' problem and the main reason that after 500 years in Kosovo, they may soon find they're no longer welcome in their own homeland.

Dervish hated the Kosovar Turk most trusted by the Albanian leadership, Sezair Shaiپی. "The difference between me and Shaiپی," said Dervish, "is Shaiپی doesn't care about the Turkish minority. Instead he's causing trouble by accusing us of helping Milosevic. If I were in Shaiپی's place as Municipal Deputy, I'd quit to protest Turkish not being used for official documents. Shaiپی says we're pro-Serb and anti-Albanian," whined Dervish. Ironically, this man, who admits he would have happily cooperated with any regime that treated his people well, accuses Shaiپی of being an opportunist. "I protested to help Turks, Shaiپی protested for his career."

By the time I managed to slip away from the table to pay, leaving Dervish with a sausage still on his plate. I was already a few minutes late for a meeting with his much-maligned rival. Sezair Shaiپی was waiting

<sup>2</sup> Several weeks later in Ankara I mentioned the apology issue to a senior Turkish diplomat dealing with the Balkans. Of the several explanations he offered with a rather embarrassed smile, at the top of the list was that saying sorry was alien to Turkish culture. Indeed, this horror of acknowledging responsibility is one of the most consistent and dismaying traits I've noted in Turks. Where Europeans and perhaps especially North Americans can regard the acceptance of responsibility as a sign of strength and magnanimity, most Turks seem incapable of imagining such an admission as expressing anything but weakness. A young Turkish diplomat, for instance, told me he was amazed that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would be so stupid as to acknowledge Washington's role in setting up the Shah in Iran in the 1950s. My point in saying this is not to laud American leaders for their occasional capacity to admit culpability, but to highlight this Turk's inability to recognize this capacity as an sign of strength. As this attitude toward atonement — a kind of cultural retardation — has crippled Turkey's ability to confront the ghosts of the Armenian massacres of 1915, the expulsion of Greeks in 1923 and 1955 and the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, I hope to devote a future newsletter entirely to this topic. In addition to Turks' cultural resistance to apologizing, the senior diplomat pointed out that acts of atonement are also alien to communist systems and to the embattled, defensive psychology of minority groups. He added less than halfheartedly that the Kosovar Turks had nothing to apologize for.





*(right) Serif Turgut, a veteran Turkish reporter on the Balkan wars, sits between two Turkish soldiers as she watches a young crooner and a Prizreni Turkish band was celebrating its 30th anniversary.*



for me alone at the table at the Alhambra that I'd lain beneath a couple of days before. Shaipi barely gave me time to say hello before waving me toward a table at the back of a darkened room off the main dining room. He exuded an all-too-familiar combination of belligerence and self-importance that in dozens of incarnations have already contributed heftily to turning my hair prematurely white. I ordered local red wine while Shaipi sharpened his edge on a cup of thick Turkish coffee.

"It's certain the Turks will survive as a community because as many Albanians are allowed to stay, Turks will be allowed to stay. Bosniacs too and Serbs if they want to," declared Shaipi. As anyone who has read news reports about vigilante violence against non-Albanians — especially Serbs — knows, this claim has no connection with reality. "Up to now we've had no problem with Albanians, but we can't predict the future," Shaipi continued. "We have to distinguish between political violence and fights between kids. [Like the execution-style murder by the guy working in the Alhambra, I wondered?] For ten years we've been like brothers with the Albanians. If that hadn't been the case, it would have been dangerous to stay here."

Given that he'd spent four and a half years in prison for defying Milosevic, I wasn't surprised that Shaipi didn't express enormous sympathy for the Turks who'd played it safe. At a meeting of 50 community leaders in Prizren, I'd been told, only Shaipi objected to using Turkish as a politically neutral lingua franca. "Now what will happen with those who worked with Serbs — teachers and a few journalists? We're not against them — if we were, we'd be no different from the Serbian regime," said Shaipi. "They should be allowed to continue working, but not in administrative positions. People shouldn't view this as a great trag-

edy." He said it's the same as in the US — when a political administration changed, so did the personnel.

"You might ask why Turkey didn't support the KLA and instead supported the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia [in line with all NATO members]. Now the situation has changed and Turkey feels it must support the Turks here. But the Turks have no support from Albanians because up until now they've been against them. For us it's easier because members of our party [he won't say how many members he has and others, including the OSCE, estimate there are only a handful] have been on the board of the KLA. Albanians must support us because we helped them." Shaipi justified toeing the Albanian line by arguing that it was necessary for survival — the same argument the TDB used to justify collaboration with the Milosevic regime.

Shaipi charged that the TDB, by contrast, was run by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "The Turkish army doesn't treat us as representatives. If they want to save the Turkish minority here, then they have to support us. Turkish domestic policy has liberalized but unfortunately in foreign policy they're still stuck on their old allies. Even if we haven't had contact with Turkey during the communist period, we survived. We've survived 500 years and we know how to take care of ourselves. But with Turkish support — for instance, the opportunity to attend Turkish universities — we'd have an easier time."

International officials in Prizren are divided over Shaipi, with the UN supporting him while the OSCE is deeply skeptical. Shaipi was proposed to Kouchner by persons unknown, i.e., the KLA or the moderate nationalist leader, Ibrahim Rugova. OSCE officials pointed out that Shaipi was alone in emerging from prison with all

his documents in order — suggesting that he may have cut a deal with his Serb jailers.

### A Drive through the Country

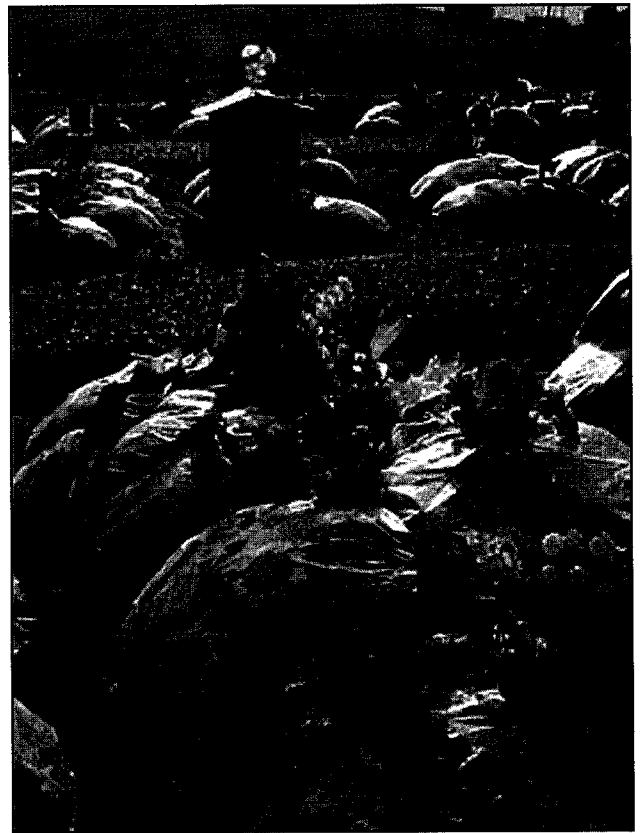
While looking for the office of a young USAID official who'd invited me to lunch, I was offered a ride by two mustachioed American police officers serving with the International Police Task Force. One was from upstate New York, the other from Tennessee. They were united by their parochial contempt for the people they'd supposedly come to serve, and made the usual assumption of racists that as a white American man I must share their attitude. As they drove through Prizren's narrow streets yelling at people to keep their cars moving and cursing them for not observing the road etiquette of small-town America, they told me frankly that they'd come to Kosovo for the money and hated the place. With shameless hypocrisy, they condemned the Kosovars for swindling American taxpayers. "These people are rich," said the cop from New York state. "And you know how?" he asked rhetorically. "Cuz we give it to them."

"They won't work," the Tennessean agreed with a disgusted snort.

After finding the USAID office and having lunch, the American manager asked one of his drivers to give me a lift out to Mamusha where my friend Serif had said she might be that day and who I hoped would have thought to bring my passport and bag from the hotel in Pristina. Abdyl Vorfi, 26, was a former high-school English teacher. Though he identified himself as Albanian, like all native Prizrenis, Abdyl spoke Turkish fluently. As we drove out to Mamusha, which was much further than I'd imagined, on our left rose the majestic-looking, snow-clad Pashtrik Mountain. I told Abdyl I was in love with Kosovo's mountains. His view of the mountain was rather different: during the NATO air campaign, six good friends of his had been caught by the Serbs while trying to cross over Pashtrik into Albania. First they were riddled by machinegun fire. Then all six were decapitated. Abdyl looked at the headless bodies and noted that two of the boys had only been slightly wounded by bullets.

In the shadow of Pashtrik, we stopped at a cemetery that had the naked look of a new housing development waiting to be landscaped: There had been no time for grass to grow over the graves and the wood of the markers was unweathered by time. So were many of the faces in the photographs of Kosovo Liberation Army fighters who lay here. "This guy was one of the best football players in Kosovo," Abdyl said, pointing to one.

We took the turn off to Mamusha, passing a checkpoint manned by Turkish soldiers. Another 15 minutes of driving on a winding road brought us to the village, where people told us that the famous Serif Turgut hadn't been there that day. Back in Prizren Abdyl wanted to show me the high school that he'd attended until being kicked



*In the shadow of Mt. Pashtrik, fresh graves of fighters from the Kosovo Liberation Army. Almost all of them were killed with a period of a few months in the later winter and early spring of 1999.*

out, along with all other Albanian students, in 1991. Now that everyone but the Serbs were back in school, there was an acute shortage of classroom space: We arrived just as students from the afternoon shift were leaving and the evening students were starting their day. I said hello to a Turkish-language class for students who had attended a Turkish-language elementary school and were now mixed with Albanians and Bosniacs, except for their separate language classes.

"Villagers call Prizren 'Little Istanbul'," said Abdyl. "Anyone who doesn't speak Turkish isn't a citizen of Prizren." [By contrast, an Albanian who worked in Pristina as a well-paid fixer for western companies had told me that anyone who still spoke Turkish was a peasant.] But Abdyl added that the only "real Turks" were the few who'd come from Turkey in the last few years. The rest, apparently, were just Turkish-speaking Albanians with a strange confusion about their own identity.

On my last evening in Prizren I met with Raif Kirkul, a deep-voiced radio correspondent for Turkish State radio and head of the local branch of the Turkish Democratic Union, to whom Serif had introduced me at the concert. Raif had a gentle, self-effacing manner that made me like him right away. He suggested that we visit a club for local Turkish businessmen so that I

could pick up some more views before leaving.

At a darkened, two-story building several men smoking on the porch welcomed us with an apology for the electricity cut and ushered us into a living room-size chamber lit by candles. While Raif talked quietly with a couple of men at the edge of the room, I sat down at a long table with about ten others, as if we were going to hold a seance. The *"esnaf,"* a Turkish word meaning "guild," started six years before as a club for Turkish business people and professionals, like a little Rotary Club. Members pledged to be hard-working, honest, helpful and patriotic — much the same virtues inculcated in grade schools in Turkey. The phrase they used for patriotic, *"millet sever,"* literally meant "nation-loving." I asked what nation the phrase referred to in their case: Turkey? Yugoslavia? Kosovo? After a few moments of confusion the men agreed that it meant loving Prizren.

Fair enough. But what about their relationship to the nation states — both actual and potential — that might have a claim on their loyalties? They said the older generation of Kosovar Turks had studied in Belgrade, which was wrong. The younger generation would study in Turkey. As for relations between Turkish and Albanian Kosovars, the men insisted they were "intimate and mutually respectful." Said one: "We can't separate Turks and Albanians — my friends, neighbors and relatives are Albanian. We are one blood."

Another man tweaked the definition of Turkishness still further. "Some realistic Albanians admit that if the Ottomans [meaning, in this context, Turks] hadn't been here," he said, "the Albanians would have been assimilated as Greeks or Slavs." He had a theory about the endurance of the Turkish community. As a trading post along the Silk Route from the Adriatic to Asia, Prizren was the second oldest city in Yugoslavia after Dubrovnik. The skilled artisans were all Ottomans, and spoke Turkish. It was hard for non-Turks to enter their community or, conversely, to assimilate them into the larger Albanian-speaking community because the trades were controlled by guilds connected to Muslim lodges — which had the further effect of strictly limiting immigration into Prizren from the surrounding villages. Some years ago — no one was quite sure how many though all agreed that they could remember it happening — Serbs tore down the big workshops on the shadirvan in an effort to kill off the craftsmen and the Turkish culture they sustained.

"Turks may be only two or three percent of the population," said another, "but all our business is connected with the Albanian majority. If a businessman tried to sell just to Turks, he'd certainly fail. Most of our customers have been and will continue to be Albanians. For that

reason, we can't afford to disagree with them." Their vulnerability made these gentlemen perhaps the greatest living champions of the Ottoman vision of inter-sectarian tolerance embodied in the following proclamation by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. Printed on a calendar produced to celebrate the presence of Turkish troops near Prizren, it read:

*Mehmet, son of Murat Khan, always victorious!*

*The command of the honorable, sublime sultan's sign and shining seal of the conqueror of the world is as follows:*

*I, Sultan Mehmet, inform all the world that those who possess this imperial edict, the Bosnian Fransiscans, have got into my good graces, so I command:*

*Let nobody bother or disturb those who are mentioned, nor their churches, let them dwell in peace in my empire and let those who have become refugees be safe and let them return and settle down in their monasteries without fear in the all the countries of my empire.*

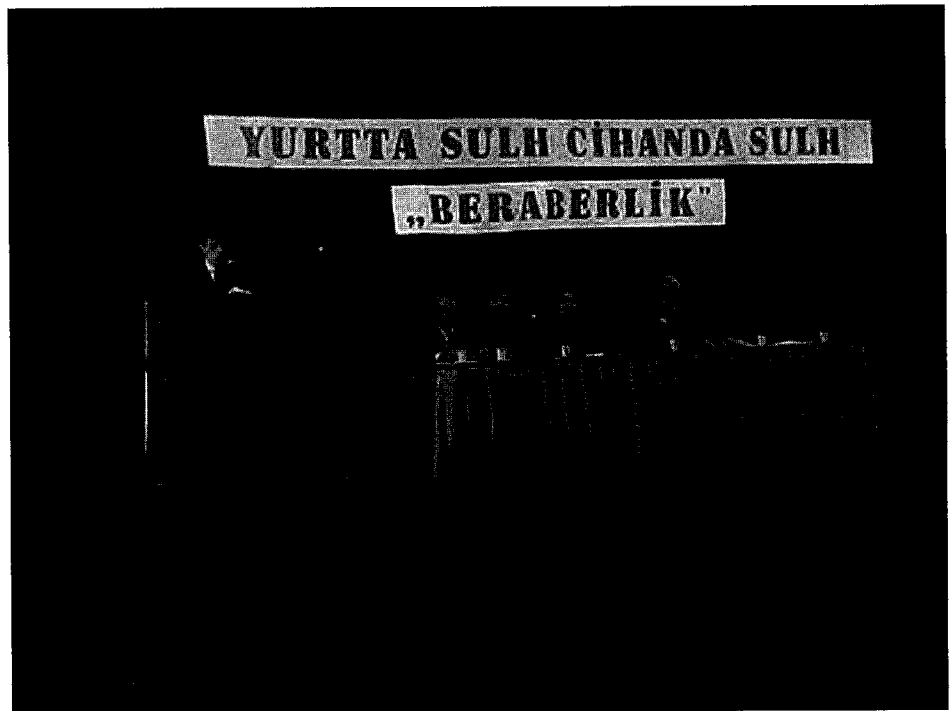
*Neither my Royal Highness nor my viziers nor employees nor my servants nor any of the servants of my empire shall insult or endanger either their life or the property of their church. Even if they bring somebody from abroad into my country, they are allowed to do so. To this end I have graciously issued this imperial edict, hereby take my great oath in the name of the creator of the earth and heaven, the one who feeds all creatures and in the name of the seven Mustafas and our great messenger, and in the name of my sword I put, nobody shall do contrary to what has been written as long as they are obedient and faithful to my command.<sup>3</sup>*

If concord with the Albanian majority was such a priority, I asked, why had Turks continued sending their kids to schools run by the Milosevic regime? They told me that in 1968 a group of Albanian professors began arguing that there were no Turks in Kosovo and the Turkish-language state schools should be closed. After Milosevic kicked Albanians out of schools in '91, some Turkish parents asked whether their kids would be able to resume their studies later if they studied at home until the situation stabilized. The Serbs told them that if they left, the schools would be closed for good. Though they kept their kids in state schools, the men said they'd helped to pay the salaries of teachers working in the Albanians' non-official schools. One man who owned a small clothing company claimed he'd even helped design the KLA uniforms and insignia.

Despite this support, the men acknowledged that there had been incidents of Albanian villagers who'd moved into Prizren since the war ordering people not to speak Turkish. "'Speak Albanian!' they say, or just 'Speak

<sup>3</sup> A young Albanian Kosovar woman I met had a rather different view of the Ottomans. Though her first language was Turkish, she considered herself Albanian and described the Ottoman presence in Kosovo as an "occupation." She was unswayed by the fact, as I pointed out, that 38 of the Ottomans' Grand Viziers were Albanians.

Above the stage at a meeting of Prizren's minorities hangs a banner with a quote from Turkey's founding father: "Peace at home, peace in the world." For most of Turkey's 75-year history this meant not interfering in neighboring countries affairs, even on behalf of Turkish minorities. With Turkish troops near Prizren, Ankara has been playing an unusually assertive role in Kosovo.



as God speaks!" Other locals say the villagers resent Turkish as the language of the old aristocracy. [In the week after I left, international police were called to the high school to break up a fight between students who identified themselves as Turks and others who called themselves Albanian.]

Most of the men said they were more upset that the 65 year-old local Turkish theater received no support from the state. Though amateur, the theater had competed in the top drama festivals in Yugoslavia and the rest of the Balkans. But while there were always professional Serb and Albanian theaters — supported, like all cultural initiatives in the communist state, by state funds — the Yugoslav government had never funded a Turkish one. "Today nothing has changed," one actor fumed. "They don't want a professional Turkish theater because then people would know that Turks were living here!" Another actor asked whether I thought this was fair. I said that the microscopic fraction of Kosovo's undoubtedly tiny budget for theater to which Turks would be entitled struck me as an unpromising thing to focus on and suggested that they'd be better off seeking corporate sponsorship in Turkey. The man who asked the question stormed out of the room. I realized that I'd offered the right solution for the wrong problem. What the men in the this room really wanted wasn't money, it was recognition by what remained of the state that throughout their lives had dispensed its largesse like a great *pater famiglia*.

My host Raif and I left the *esnaf* for the nearby Union of Artists bar and discussed my impressions of Kosovo over a bottle of decent red wine. I told him the future of the Turkish community would look much brighter if he were head of the Turkish Democratic Union instead of just its local branch. For the very reasons that I thought

he'd be good — his modesty, skepticism, wide view — Raif was planning to get out of politics altogether. Though born and raised in Prizren, Raif said he felt like an outsider. As the Turkish community was trapped between Belgrade and the Kosovo Liberation Army, both Turks in Turkey and Albanian Kosovars were suspicious of his dual identity as a Turkish Kosovar. During training at TRT [Turkish State Radio and Television] in Istanbul, he was accused of being a Yugoslav spy. Back in Kosovo he's suspected of working for Turkey's intelligence agency, MIT.

Raif said a Greek woman had once told him: "The worst curse from God is to live as a member of a minority."

"If I were a normal person, I wouldn't live in Kosovo, I would leave," said Raif. "But I am not a normal person."

### Postscript

Back in Turkey, I went to Ankara and had a three-hour meeting with a senior Turkish diplomat dealing with Kosovo, who prefers not to be mentioned by name. Contrary to the brave face the Turkish Kosovars themselves put on, he said that no one could say whether the Turkish minority in Kosovo would survive. The broader Kosovo mission, he acknowledged that was going down the toilet. Resolution 1244, which talks about granting Kosovo "comprehensive autonomy" but leaves its final status to be decided in 2002, is so vague a mandate that even UN Administrator Bernard Kouchner didn't understand it.

The diplomat believed that if they didn't feel secure

in Kosovo, the Turks there were ready to come to Turkey. Those between the ages of 20 and 40 have already left. Older people have hung on so far in the hope that the value of their real estate would rise.

Turkey's basic policy is to encourage Turks abroad to stay where they are, hoping that they'll serve as a bridge for Turkish influence. On the other hand, if Turkey had to absorb all the Turks living in Kosovo, it wouldn't be a big deal. The diplomat made the point that there are already more Albanians living in Turkey [over three million] than in Kosovo and Albania put together. Many Turks want dual citizenship, partly so they can assume legal ownership of property now held for them in Turkey by friends and relatives.

On a trip to Kosovo just before mine, the diplomat told me, he'd urged Turks to come to terms with the new realities. "The Foreign Ministry wants Turks to be tolerant and to take the initiative in building bridges with the Albanians. The Turks said they would," said he. On April 2 the Turkish Democratic Union held a party congress and replaced Tunaligil, the psychologically ghettoized chief of the TDB's little political machine in Prizren, with Mahir Yagcilari. Unlike the former chairman, Yagcilari was not tarnished by allegations of collaboration. Tunaligil became deputy chairman. The Turkish Foreign Ministry had pushed the party hard to persuade them to replace Tunaligil, who stepped aside only very reluctantly. In the end he engineered enough votes from his power base in Mamusha to get himself elected to the number two post.

At the abortive peace talks in Rambouillet Turkey had fought its corner with characteristic tenacity, arguing that the rights of the Turkish minority shouldn't be less than those granted in the '74 constitution. At Rambouillet the western powers had first proposed a threshold of 5 percent of the population for a minority group to be represented on the UN's ruling council, which would have eliminated the Turks. Ankara persuaded them to lower the barrier to .5 percent, so Turks were included. The diplomat acknowledged, Turks were pushing for *collective* rights — also known as affirmative action or positive discrimination — which the allies were very reluctant to

grant. "But for a political guy like me," he said, "it would be suicide to ignore rights previously granted, even if only on paper."

Since this conversation, plans on paper, whether Turkey's, NATO's or the UN's, have come to look increasingly irrelevant in the face of an underfunded international presence and increasing violence by Albanian nationalists. In June a former Kosovo Liberation Army leader named Ekrem Rexha, known as Commander Drini, was assassinated in Prizren by his former comrades-in-arms. A charismatic leader on the battlefield and a friend of the West who was due to begin a Mason Fellowship at Harvard this autumn, Commander Drini was, in the words of a UN official who knew him well, "the best and the brightest in Kosovo." That, apparently, was his undoing. His rivals knew that in the elections tentatively scheduled for this autumn, Commander Drini would have towered over them. If Albanian war heroes can be killed so easily, tainted minority groups in Kosovo have a bleak future indeed.

On September 19 the Turkish Foreign Ministry announced the fruits of intensive diplomatic activity aimed at securing for the Kosovar Turks the rights they had previously enjoyed under the province's 1974 Constitution. After meeting in Ankara with representatives of the Kosovar Turks and UN Administrator Bernard Kouchner, Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem lobbied UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in NY to restore to the Turks of Kosovo the rights they lost after the NATO bombing and expulsion of the Serbian police and administration. It yielded a letter from Dr. Kouchner to Mahir Yagcilari, chairman of the Turkish Democratic Union. Addressed to the Turkish community, it said the UN administration in Kosovo reaffirmed the Turkish community's equality with the Albanian and Serb communities. It specifically promised that in areas where Turks live, the UN will issue regulations in Turkish, will issue ID cards with information also in Turkish, will guarantee the right to education in Turkish and will ensure Turks' opportunity to participate fully in elections scheduled for October 22, which they had previously planned to boycott. The Foreign Ministry says it welcomes the document and will closely monitor its implementation. □





# Institute of Current World Affairs

## — Fellows and their Activities —

### EUROPE/RUSSIA

#### Gregory Feifer—Russia

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

#### Whitney Mason—Turkey

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the Vladivostok News and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

#### Jean Benoît Nadeau—France

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

### SOUTH ASIA

#### Shelly Renae Browning—Australia

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

### THE AMERICAS

#### Wendy Call—Mexico

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

#### Peter Keller—Chile

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

#### Susan Sterner—Brazil

A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women.

#### Tyrone Turner—Brazil

A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced photo-essays on youth violence in New Orleans, genocide in Rwanda and mining in Indonesia. As an Institute Fellow he is photographing and writing about Brazilian youth from São Paulo in the industrial South to Recife and Salvador in the Northeast.

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Phone: (603) 643-5548 E-Mail: [ICWA@valley.net](mailto:ICWA@valley.net)  
 Fax: (603) 643-9599 Web Site: [www.icwa.org](http://www.icwa.org)

Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin  
 Program Assistant: Brent Jacobson  
 Publications Manager: Ellen Kozak

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Four West Wheelock Street

Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA