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### **Mostar and Iber: two Bridges simmered by dilemmas**

The Balkan's history has a heavy weight over its politics. Local politicians throughout the region are using, exploiting and abusing local history due to their purely political function and conviction. On the other hand historians turn their profession in service to a particular political party or based upon their personal interests in politics. This way politics is intertwined with history.

It seems that such a typical alliance of politics and science in the Balkans continues to even exist throughout the Bridges of the Balkan Peninsula. Let's take a glimpse over the two most tragic and symbolic bridges in the Balkans: the Bridge of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bridge of Iber in Kosovo.

Twenty years ago Croatian bombardments brought to ruins the Bridge of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It became the symbol of communications, co-existence, and connections among peoples while overcoming natural, historical and ethno-cultural barriers.

The destruction of Mostar Bridge embodied a symbolism of bad luck. A bridge that was built in medieval times had been destroyed in modern times. It was destroyed in the middle of democratic and peaceful United Europe, the very same Bridge that had survived crusades, empires and endless wars. A connection among people was being destroyed only a few years after the Berlin Wall was coming apart....

After the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, the Bridge of Mostar was built again in order to connect the two separated shores. The Dayton Accords was going to be tested over this bridge. Sadly, the truth continues to be stubbornly bitter. Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be ethnically very much divided. This is not the only concern, on the same vein, Republika Srpska, from time to time, is attempting to hold a referendum that could secure its autonomy. In front of this situation Belgrade is silent. Is this silence an approval!?

The Bridge of Iber was recently opened in Kosovo. The country appeared as if a cardiac artery - that had been blocked for years and life had vanished in Northern Kosovo - was being opened. A hope was nascent once again. Kosovo was happy. However Belgrade was silent. Is this a silence that opens the path of coexistence among two nations and countries!?

The history of the Balkans goes from an ethnic bridge to another. When the Bridge of Mostar was being restored, another Bridge in the Balkans was being closed. It was the Bridge of Iber in Northern Kosovo. The historic process of Kosovo in 1999 got trapped right there...and this Bridge was standing tall without any paved road on both of its sides, it is a dead - end street until today.

The Bridge of Iber became a symbol of malicious heritage. It was a symbol of ethnic divide, hate, fear and animosity among the two peoples. That bridge was a testimony of dysfunctional environment in the State of Kosovo and of the brutal and paralyzing intervention of Belgrade's official policy.

The Bridge of Iber was opened. However in the middle of it "is the wall of xenophobia". Such a 'wall' has its foundations even deeper and wider than any other bridge. Kosovo's Leader, Hashim Thaçi is bowing every day in front of Serbian civilian victims that were killed in the War of Kosovo. President Thaçi is making a genuine public apology to a small group of Serbian victims; and this is the right thing to do. His attempt to secure a pardon is a moral step towards reconciliation. In other words, Kosovo wants to pass the Bridge.

Meanwhile, Serbian Leaders have not made a single step towards begging an apology to the victims' families of Albanian People of Kosovo. In Kosovo we had genocide and massive crimes against humanity. In Kosovo were killed and executed more than ten thousand Albanians in their own homes and native lands. In Kosovo disappeared more than twelve thousand civilians. There have been violated thousands of women and girls. There have been forcefully, internally and externally displaced (civilians threatened by imminent execution or death) more than eight hundred thousand citizens. Such a tragedy is known throughout the world. Only Belgrade is silent.

When and who will apologize to the people of Kosovo? When will Aleksandar Vučić and [Tomislav Nikolić](#) bow in front of the massive tombs and cemeteries throughout Kosovo!? Can these efforts, aimed to ensure a full reconciliation of bilateral relations, be considered trustworthy for as long as Belgrade has not begged for a public apology? An apology is a moral

act. Without an apology there cannot be a genuine reconciliation among these two neighboring countries. As a consequence Serbia wants to freeze the Bridge of Iber.

The Bridge of Iber covered today by histories of division still reflects the geopolitical clashes of nations and different international countries in this very small corner of the Balkans, including today's great powers. It appears that history over the Bridge of Iber has become amorphous, motionless; the hours of the world order are stuck. The Cold War continues to maintain this Bridge divided.

This is why many people may rightfully ask: is the Bridge open yet? Can we assume that the Government of Kosovo will extend its influence on the other side of the Bridge? Has the Serbian minority refrained from its rebellion against Prishtina and from Belgrade's guidance? Does this mean an inner Albanian-Serbian reconciliation? Will the efforts of Serbian minorities to establish Parallel Institutions inside the territory of Kosovo cease to exist? Will Kosovo's Independence be approved by the two permanent members of UN Security Council, Russian Federation and People's Republic of China? Are we going to have the beginning of a significant change of World Order from such a small Bridge!?

The source of these questions was the statement made from the Director of Kosovo Affairs in the Government of Serbia, Mr. Marko Đurić and the concerns of Russian Diplomacy from Belgrade all the way to the UN Security Council meeting of August 2016.

Mr. Marko Đurić, as the Iber Bridge was not even cleaned up from the obstacles of the past, expressed his disappointment on the fact that the agreement of the Association of Villages with Serbian ethnic majority inside Kosovo was not implemented, stating from Belgrade that..."Very soon we will begin a dialogue in Brussels in order to establish the Association of Villages located in the territory of Kosovo that have a Serbian ethnic majority..."

In the mean time Russian Ambassador to the Security Council expressed his concerns that "in Kosovo International Agreements are not being implemented," making a clear reference to the Association of Villages with a Serbian ethnic majority in Kosovo. Moreover the highest leadership levels at the Kremlin have openly expressed their concerns in regards to the delay of Serbian Villages' Association within the territory of Kosovo.

Such a Ruso-Serbian warning in reference to the establishment of the Association of Villages with a Serbian ethnic majority in the sovereign territory of Kosovo has a clear strategic intention at its hindmost. Through that association there is an attempt to close other bridges inside Kosovo, to design connected enclaves among themselves, to juxtapose ethnic division, to install a Republika Srpska throughout Kosovo. Later on, just like Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina that aims to hold a referendum in order to be separated from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; such an Association inside Kosovo could initiate a similar referendum at the right moment for Serbia.

Such referendums are inspired by the spectacular referendum of Crimea, stirred, instigated and fulfilled by Russian Federation. The spectacular referendum of Russia separated Crimea with violence from the territorial mainland of Ukraine. The same scenario and an equal strategy are pursued by Serbia in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Republic of Kosovo.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian institutions are ready. Republika Srpska controls approximately 51 percent of the territory of the federation. Serbia has no equal structures in Kosovo. It seems that Northern Mitrovica has not fulfilled this mission. This is why the Bridge of Iber was established as an alibi that aims in fact to create an environment for the Serbian penetration throughout Kosovo through the creation of this Association, which brings a great menace to the sovereignty and functioning of the young State of Kosovo.

The Bridge of Iber was opened. Over that bridge is only walking a dilemma: will the state of Kosovo extend its control all the way to its northern gorges, or the Association of Serbian Villages will penetrate at the heart of Kosovo's hinterlands?

We all know that bridges are built with two lanes. The Bells are ringing, is anyone listening...

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