



Briefing Summary

Kosovo and its Relationship with Israel

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In February 2015, Dr. Enver Hoxhaj, a Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Kosovo, Chairman of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, and Kosovo's former Foreign Minister, visited Israel. During his visit, Dr. Hoxhaj held a briefing at the Mitvim Institute, which focused on Kosovo's current socio-political situation, its international standing, and Kosovo-Israel relations.

This document summarizes Dr. Hoxhaj's remarks during the briefing.

- **The Republic of Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence was not unilateral**, contrary to what is commonly thought. The declaration was made in coordination with the international community, and only took place after rounds of negotiation with Serbia that were held under the auspices of the United Nations. The United Nations-led international force that was stationed in Kosovo was also an extraordinary success. And it led to the creation of the republic, even if this was unintended.
- **One cannot draw a comparison between the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the collapse of the Soviet Union.** In the case of the Soviet Union, there was coordination between the satellite states and Moscow, which in turn gave its blessing to the declarations of independence that followed. In the Balkans, there was no central authority with which the states could coordinate or which would approve of their establishment. **The Republic of Kosovo was established 30 years after Yugoslavia disintegrated.** In the case of the Soviet Union, events unfolded at a much faster pace.

- The population of the Republic of Kosovo is 90% Albanian, but **it is still a multi-ethnic country**, rather than an Albanian country. Kosovo is a successful example of a state in which **various ethnic groups can all work together in political, social and economic life**. The parliament has 120 seats, 20 of which are allocated to the representatives of its various communities. These representatives' seats are guaranteed, even if they do not receive enough votes on the national level. In addition, a permanent power-sharing mechanism is part of our political system. For example, the deputy prime minister and two government ministers must always be Serbs. **Kosovo is not only building a country, it is building a society as well.**
- Since its establishment, Kosovo has cultivated a reputation as a **politically stable** country. Stability is critical for a new and small state. Twenty years ago, Kosovo was chaotic, much like today's Middle East. Since then, much has changed. **Kosovo is an economic success story**. It was founded in the midst of a severe economic crisis across Europe, and despite the difficulties Kosovo was able to increase its levels of economic growth. Today these levels are approximately 4-5%. The declaration of independence contributed not only to Kosovo's political situation, but to its socio-economic situation as well. **Many Kosovars returned home from the diaspora**, bringing with them a variety of cultures, languages, and skills that have contributed significantly to the building of the state and its vibrant society.
- Kosovo has enacted a series of **reforms in various areas, from the economy and the judiciary to media and civil society**, in accordance with the requirements of the European Union (EU). These steps led to the signing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, which could lead to full EU membership for Kosovo in the future. Since 2011, **a Kosovo-Serbia dialogue has been taking place** under the auspices of the EU on the topic of the normalization of relations between the two countries. Some 30 agreements have been signed between the parties and 6 border crossings have been opened. It has been agreed that neither Serbia nor Kosovo will attempt to prevent the other from joining the EU.
- The **Republic of Kosovo has been recognized by 108 countries**, 95% of whom are democracies, and the country is a member of some 50 multinational organizations. **Kosovo has good ties with countries that have not recognized it**. **Greece**, for example, has not recognized Kosovo because of its own economic crisis and not because of fears related to the ongoing conflict in Cyprus. The Greeks intended to recognize Kosovo but pulled back because of the economic crisis. **China**, breaking with past traditions, looks at the issue of Kosovo as one that must be solved by the EU and it will not prevent Kosovo from being recognized by others. Russia, which has a Chancery rather than an embassy in Pristina, refuses to recognize the country only because the Serbs have asked them not to do so. **Kosovo enjoys strong standing in the EU and in the United States. Serbia has strong standing in the United Nations,**

especially as a result of its ties with Russia. At the end of the day, Serbia has a vested interest in reaching an agreement and normalizing relations with Kosovo, for without such an arrangement it will never be admitted to the EU.

- There is a small Jewish community in Kosovo and **during World War II it was protected**. The Jews were seen as people who must be protected because of the strong Albanian tradition of hospitality. In Kosovo, **there were no anti-Semitic movements**, as opposed to other Balkan countries.
- **Kosovo is interested in beginning a new era in its relations with Israel** on the political, economic and social levels. History cannot be stopped and Kosovo will remain an independent country forever. **Kosovo seeks Israel's recognition** and Israel should judge Kosovo as a case unto itself, rather than by comparing it to the Palestinian declaration of independence.
- **Kosovo has a pro-Israel stance**, and has made it clear that its intention is to maintain this. Kosovo is a Western, modern and democratic country – much like Israel. It has the same allies in the Euro-Atlantic region, chiefly among them the United States. **Over the last seven years Kosovo has not applied pressure upon Israel to recognize it, but now it may be time to do so.**
- Kosovo expected that Israel would make clear to Serbia, after it voted in favor of recognizing a Palestinian state, that this step would result in Israel's possible recognition of Kosovo. That did not occur. Serbia recognized Palestinian independence after the PLO's declaration in 1988 (via Yugoslavia). For some reason, **Israel remains loyal to the Serbs despite their pro-Palestinian voting record.**