

Lecture by Professor Dusan Sidjanski
“The European Future of Serbia and Kosovo”
22 May 2007

Report

Prof. Loukas Tsoukalis, president of ELIAMEP, introduced Professor Dusan Sidjanski, from the University of Geneva. Professor Sidjanski presented a historical narrative of Serbia and Kosovo and of the cultural and religious importance of the region for Serbs. Through this background, he articulated the current challenges being faced by the region.

He traced through recent diplomatic and political developments in the Region and referred to three core reports that have, to some extent, influenced perceptions towards the region's future: “The Balkan's in Europe's Future” report by the International Commission on the Balkans, the Human Rights Report of 2006, and the report by Ambassador Kai Eide. Dusan Sidjanski distinguished between the terms “final status” and “future status” of Kosovo. He stressed the importance of this distinction because of the region's dynamic nature.

Professor Dusan Sidjanski referred to the difference between reality and what the officials have told of the situation. He outlined the main problems in Kosovo including corruption and violence as demonstrated by the riots in 2004, when 30 churches were destroyed. One aspect that had improved was the relationship between the government of Kosovo and the church, which in turn gave people more religious freedom. He underlined the importance of minority rights for a region that had suffered much as a result of discrimination and ethnic cleavage. With reference to the issue of the return of refugees that amount to approximately 200,000 only 15,000 have returned to Kosovo. He pointed out the significant absence of investments, which has resulted in poor infrastructure, low rate of privatization, and inadequate educational and health care systems. The numbers of people living in poverty and unemployment is much too high, as proven by the 60% of women who are unemployed.

Professor Sidjanski expressed his own perspective on the problems. He argued for the need of more ‘fine leaders,’ and efforts to increase public support given the fragile nature of the state.

Professor Sidjanski proposed a more active role on the part of the E.U.. He also highlighted the importance for the Balkan states need to mutually respect each other, as countries and as societies. In conclusion, he argued that if and only if there is cooperation among Serbia, Kosovo and the E.U. will the process of creating a viable, independent state for Kosovo, and the separate progressions of Serbia and Kosovo be plausible.

The floor was then open for discussion. Questions were raised with regards to Russia's vote in the Security Council, the possibilities of Serbia entering the E.U. and the cooperation amongst the Balkan countries. Sidjanski replied that Russia's motivations behind the vote cannot be read, nor interpreted. The possibilities of Serbia entering the E.U., he said, are increasing. And lastly, he expressed the need for further cooperation between the Balkan countries but concluded that there probably cannot be a union between Serbia and Kosovo again.

This event was made possible by the cooperation of the Public Benefit Foundation of Alexander S. Onassis and ELIAMEP. The audience consisted of approximately 80 people, with Ambassadors present as well as Representatives from the Greek press, Academics, and students.