

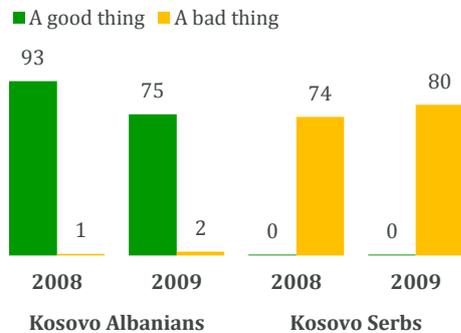
# Kosovo's Independence

In recent years, one of the most divisive issues in the Western Balkans has been the status of Kosovo. Its unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008 has since been backed by 69 countries, including the US and the majority of EU member states. However, many countries – among them China, Russia and five EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) – have not recognised Kosovo as a separate state. In August 2008, Serbia asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule on the legality of Kosovo's secession. As a result, on July 22, 2010, the Court stated that declaration of independence had not violated international law or UN resolution 1244. Despite that ruling, opinions remain deeply divided: shortly after the ICJ's finding, Serb President Boris Tadić insisted that Kosovo's independence would never be recognised. It looks certain that Kosovo's relations with Serbia will remain tense for some time.

As this issue is vital to the future stability and growth of the region, Gallup Balkan Monitor surveys contain a block of questions aimed at determining Balkan residents' views about the disputed territory. For example, in each survey, both Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians are asked how they feel about the prospect of living together in an independent Kosovo and people throughout the region are asked if they believe that Kosovo's declaration of independence has had a major impact on the stability of the Western Balkans. This *Focus On Kosovo's Independence* examines how the people of the region, and in particular those living in Kosovo and Serbia, feel about the dispute and how it will impact the region in the coming years.

## Mixed views on the long-term impact of independence

Fewer Kosovo Albanians find independence to be a 'good thing', Kosovo Serbs growing ever more critical



In your opinion, has the independence of Kosovo turned out to be rather a good thing, or rather a bad thing? %, base: Kosovo respondents

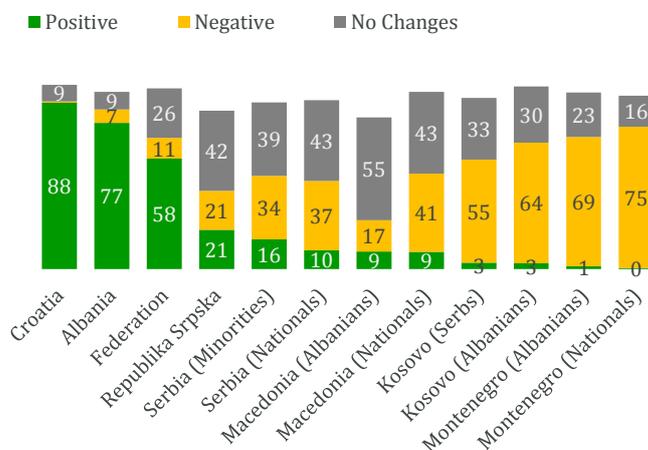
When, shortly after the declaration of independence, the *Gallup Balkan Monitor* asked people in Kosovo for their assessment of the territory's secession from Serbia, the verdict of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians was clear: 93% said that independence had *turned out to be a good thing*. Not surprisingly, Kosovo Serbs did not agree: hardly any of them shared that view and three-quarters (74%) took a totally opposite view, seeing Kosovo's independence as a *bad thing*. A year later, in 2009, the percentage of Kosovo Serbs giving such a negative assessment had risen by six percentage points to 80%. In parallel, fewer Kosovo Albanians now thought that independence had turned out well: down 18 percentage points to 75%.

As for the impact of the declaration of independence on the stability of the Western Balkans region, majorities of Kosovo Albanians (64%) and Kosovo Serbs (55%) both felt that that to-date the consequences had been negative.

Across the region, however, opinions were divided: while vast majorities in Croatia and Albania (88% and 77%, respectively) thought that Kosovo's declaration of independence had had a positive influence on Balkan stability, in Montenegro, the majority of both Montenegrin nationals and Albanians (75% and 69%, respectively) felt that it had made the region less stable. After the ICJ ruling, this feeling was echoed by Montenegrin Foreign Minister Milan Rocen who stated that stability in the region was needed to bring the people together so that faster progress could be made towards European integration.

At the same time, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dušanka Majić, the Serb president of the upper house of the central parliament said that Republika Srpska had all it now needed to follow Kosovo's route if it decided to do so.

Respondents in Croatia, Albania and the BiH Federation see effects of Kosovo independence as positive for the region, people in Montenegro disagree



So far, has Kosovo's independence had positive or negative consequences on the stability of the region? %, Survey wave: 2009, base: all respondents

Somewhat surprisingly then, only one in five respondents in the Republika Srpska had seen Kosovo's declaration of independence in a positive light. People in both Bosnian entities seem less and less convinced by the claim made by many supporters of Kosovo's independence – that it would not constitute a precedent for other separatist movements. While a relative majority of respondents in the Federation (44%) still disagreed with the statement that the Kosovar declaration would constitute a precedent for a split-off Serbian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the number of those agreeing with the statement rose strongly from just 23% in 2008 to 35% in 2009. In Republika Srpska, a

relative majority of 43% (both in 2008 and in 2009) agreed with the claim that *Kosovo's independence set a precedent for Bosnia and Herzegovina's future and cleared the way for the secession of their entity.*

## Doubts about multi-ethnic coexistence in Kosovo

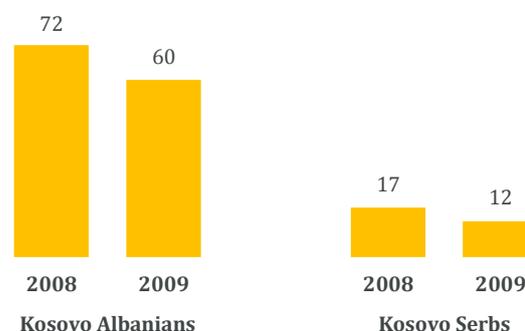
Immediately after the declaration of independence in 2008, almost three-quarters (72%) of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians were convinced it would be possible to *live peacefully together with Serbs in an independent Kosovo.* Just 12 months later, they were less optimistic: the proportion of Kosovo Albanians convinced that they could live peacefully with ethnic Serbs had dropped by 12 percentage points to 60%. A parallel development could be observed among Kosovo Serbs, albeit on a much smaller scale: while in 2008, about one in six (17%) were hopeful that peaceful coexistence would be possible, this figure shrunk by five percentage points in 2009. Two-thirds (67%) of Kosovo Serbs disagreed that such coexistence would be possible.

While this divergence of views did not translate directly into a fear of an outbreak of war, the responses to questions on that topic were a cause for concern: about one-third (31%) of Kosovo Serbs thought that the dispute would lead to armed conflict. This fear was not shared by Kosovo's ethnic Albanians where only 5% saw such a danger on their territory.

Similarly, only 8% of Kosovo Albanians *agreed with those Serbs who did not feel secure in Kosovo* (down from 15% in 2008), while among Kosovo Serbs, the proportion not feeling secure rose from 85% to 93% between 2008 and 2009. Under such conditions, Kosovo Serbs felt the need for more backing from the government of Serbia. When asked how they assessed the government's efforts in offering them protection, 59% said these efforts had been *only fair or poor* – while a minority of 39% perceived them as being *good or excellent.*

Some commentators in the region have discussed a division of the Kosovo territory as a way of resolving the dispute: for example, the Serbian-majority parts of Kosovo would join Serbia while the Albanian-majority parts would remain independent. However, according to the *Gallup Balkan Monitor*, such a solution would find little support with either of the ethnic groups: 94% of Kosovo Albanians and 82% of Kosovo Serbs rejected such a solution, with only 2% and 12% respectively, considering it to be acceptable.

Belief in peaceful coexistence decreasing among both ethnic groups in Kosovo

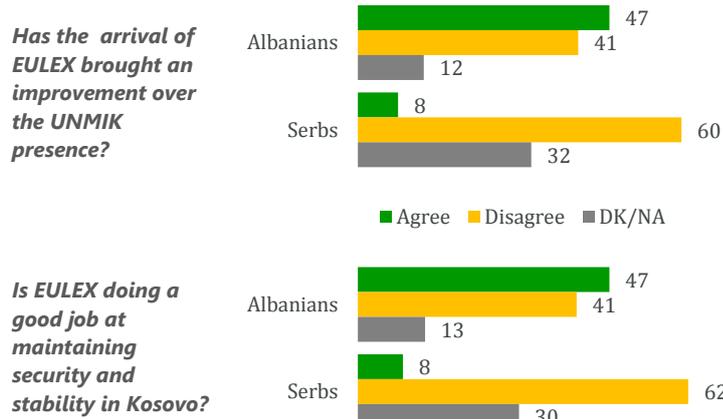


*Do you think it would be possible to live together peacefully with the Serbs/Albanians in an independent Kosovo? % yes, base: respondents in Kosovo*

## Weak support for international presence in Kosovo

Despite the unilateral declaration of independence, Kosovo is still far from being a fully autonomous state: the International Civilian Representative (ICR), a post currently held by Pieter Feith, formerly the EU Council's Deputy Director-General for Politico-Military Affairs, has far-reaching powers like annulling legislation deemed to be inconsistent with the 'Ahtisaari Plan', currently serving as a basis for Kosovo's governmental setup. Besides the ICR, who also serves as the EU Special Representative (EUSR), the EU also has a strong presence in the territory with its rule of law mission EULEX. The mission consists of police officers, legal staff and administrative experts that assist Kosovo authorities in the creation of a multi-ethnic police force, justice system and administration. EULEX, which is taking over many functions of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), also holds limited

Albanians divided about EULEX, Serbs disapprove strongly



Survey wave: 2009, base: respondents in Kosovo

clearer opinion: 58% saw no necessity for the ICR/EUSR role, 26% supported the presence and 17% did not know or gave no response.

Regarding EULEX, ethnic Albanians were much more supportive than the Kosovo Serbs. Equal proportions of Albanians (47%) stated that *EULEX had brought an improvement over the presence of UNMIK* and that *EULEX was doing a good job in maintaining security and stability in Kosovo*. The Kosovo Serbs were less convinced of the beneficial role of EULEX: only 8% preferred EULEX over UNMIK and the same proportion of interviewees were satisfied with its job in maintaining security – three-fifths (60% and 62% respectively) held contrary opinions. This is in line with the statement of the Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanović, who, after a bomb attack in Mitrovica/Northern Kosovo in early July, called for better protection of Kosovo Serbs by EULEX. It remains unclear, however, who was responsible for the attacks.

executive powers, for example in the persecution of organised crime, corruption, inter-ethnic crimes, and the maintenance of public order.

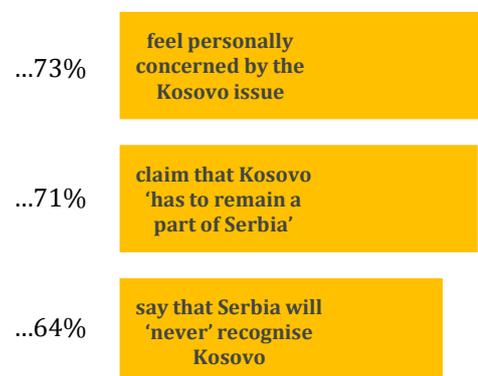
Asked whether there was a need for a position such as the ICR/EUSR in Kosovo in order for the country to function, a considerable proportion of both ethnic groups deemed an international presence to be necessary. Among ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, 38% disagreed with that proposition, 35% agreed with the ICR's presence, while 27% did not know or gave no answer. The Kosovo Serbs had a

## Serbia: strong beliefs mixed with a dose of realism

Throughout the dispute, the beliefs of respondents in Serbia have remained resolutely strong. In 2009, three-quarters (73%) of those interviewees felt personally concerned by the Kosovo issue and a similar proportion (71%) were convinced that *Kosovo had to remain part of Serbia* – a statement with which only 15% of respondents in Serbia disagreed. Furthermore, about two-thirds (64%) were convinced that Serbia would *never* recognise Kosovo (up slightly from 61% in 2008), while a quarter (24%) thought it would happen within the next 10 years. Finally, about a quarter of the Serb population (27%) demanded that Kosovo's secession *had to be prevented by arms as a last resort* with a similar percentage (25%) expecting another war on the Kosovo territory.

Despite these heartfelt beliefs, the strong international backing for Kosovo's independence seems to have impacted the opinions of the respondents in Serbia: a relative majority of 43% stated that no matter what Serbs did, *Kosovo would be independent one day*, with

Among respondents in Serbia...



What would you say, does the question of Kosovo's independence concern you? | Do you agree with the statement: *Kosovo has to remain part of Serbia?* | When do you think Serbia will recognise Kosovo's independence? Survey wave: 2009, base: respondents in Serbia

39% disagreeing with that statement. Asked whether the partition of Kosovo might be part of a future solution to the Kosovo dispute, 45% of Serb respondents agreed while 40% did not find such a development to be realistic.

For most Serb respondents it was out of the question to give up Kosovo for EU membership: 70% disagreed with such a proposal, while 16% would agree if their government gave EU membership a higher priority.

# Conclusions

## Mixed views on the long-term impact of independence

It is undoubtedly true that the ICJ's decision about Kosovo's declaration of independence has been a boost for Kosovo's ethnic Albanians. Between 2008 and 2009, however, the proportion of that group believing that Kosovo's independence had turned out to be a good thing dropped by 18 percentage points to 75%. This reduction could have been due to the poor economic situation in the country rather than a feeling that independence had been a wrong step. However, looking further afield, there were diverging views about the impact of Kosovo's independence on the stability of the Western Balkans region. Respondents in Croatia and Albania were primarily of the view that independence had been positive, while those in Montenegro and the people of Kosovo – both ethnic groups – saw the region becoming less stable as a result of the dispute. One could argue that these latter results were due to Serbia's worsening relationship with both Kosovo and Montenegro.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, people in both ethnic entities seem less convinced that Kosovo's independence would not constitute a precedent for other separatist movements. While in Republika Srpska, unsurprisingly, a relative majority agreed with the claim that *Kosovo's independence cleared the way for the secession* of their entity, over a third (35%) of respondents in the Federation also thought that the Kosovo declaration constituted a precedent for a split-off Serbian entity.

## Doubts about multi-ethnic coexistence in Kosovo

Despite the court ruling, it is unlikely that it will have any impact on the ability of Albanians and Serbs to co-exist peacefully in the short-term. In 2009, both groups saw peaceful coexistence as less likely, compared to their views 12 months earlier. Indeed, Kosovo Serbs felt less secure in 2009 than they had in 2008, to the extent that almost all ethnic Serbs (93%) felt insecure in Kosovo. They wanted more support from Serbia and dismissed any thoughts of a division of the Kosovo territory. Serbia's recent



*Clear priorities – young Kosovars celebrating in February 2008.*

announcement that it would never accept Kosovo's declaration of independence would therefore be welcomed by ethnic Serbs, while hardly making them feel more secure in the territory.

## Weak support for international presence in Kosovo

Both major ethnic groups in Kosovo are not convinced of the benefit of the international presence in the country. In both groups (38% of Albanians and 58% of Serbs) the largest proportions were convinced that the country would be able to function without the presence of the International Civilian Representative / EU Special Representative.

A strong majority of Serbs were also convinced that the EU's rule-of-law mission EULEX had not brought an improvement (62%), and that EULEX was not doing a good job at maintaining security and stability on the territory (60%). Yet, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were more supportive of EULEX: 47% preferred EULEX rather than its predecessor UNMIK and found the former to be good at safeguarding security and stability.

## Serbia: strong beliefs mixed with a dose of realism

The *Gallup Balkan Monitor* results reflect the strong sentiments in Serbia about the Kosovo dispute. A large majority felt personally concerned and was

convinced that Kosovo should remain part of Serbia. However, these sentiments were accompanied by a sense of realism: almost half of Serb respondents (43%) felt that Kosovo would become independent regardless of what Serbs did. A similar number (45%) even thought that the partition of Kosovo might be a future solution.

Since the ICJ ruling, Serbia's position has hardened somewhat and President Tadić is planning to go to the UN to seek a negotiated compromise on the future of the territory. With 70% of Serbs unwilling to accept Kosovo's independence as a price for joining the EU, it could be that Tadić will take that as a mandate and retain his forthright position on the issue. EU member states, however, could see things differently and make Tadić an offer he cannot refuse.

#### **Methodology of the Gallup Balkan Monitor**

- Multi-year comparative project in all Western Balkan countries
- A stratified random sample of 1,000 respondents per country
- Stand-alone samples of ethnic minorities and other entities
- Face-to-face methodology
- Comparative questions allowing for time series across survey waves (three waves have been undertaken between 2006 and 2009)
- Margin of error: +/- 3%

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