



Serbia is working hard on reconstruction. After the devastation of 1999, Belgrade is rebuilding – peace and infrastructure – piece by piece.

The ballad of the post-war gap

In Serbia, between the young and the old, between the poor and the rich, there is a gap over the main issues, like Kosovo and the EU

Cédric Lizotte, DSJ

Going out from her apartment in the middle of New Belgrade, Ana pets her dog, gives it fresh water for the day and closes the door shut. She doesn't like to take the elevator to go down, so she skips through the stairs with her hands in her pockets.

The 25-year-old part-time journalist lives in a 2-bedroom flat with her mother and sister in a building constructed between 1948 and 1952, like most of the residential buildings around. Subtlety of architecture and elegant materials were not on the Communist party's agenda and so the whole area looks somewhat the same. The building itself is not in good

TIMELINE - SERBIA

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| 20 | Battle of Kosovo -> 1389 |
| | Treaty of Berlin -> 1878 |
| | Balkan Wars -> 1912 |
| | Foundation of Yugoslavia -> 1943 |
| | Tito's death -> 1980 |
| 25 | Slovenia, Macedonia and Croatia declare independence from Yugoslavia -> 1991 |
| | War in Bosnia -> 1992 |
| | Foundation of the Kosovo Liberation Army -> 1996 |
| 30 | NATO bombs Belgrade, UN administers Kosovo -> 1999 |
| | Milosevic resigns following mass demonstrations -> 2000 |
| 35 | Assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic -> 2003 |
| | Death of Milosevic -> 2006 |
| | Montenegro declares independence-> 2006 |

shape. In common areas, the occasional broken glass covers the ground where graffiti and dust are used as ornamentation.

5 Serbia has been trying to recover from the NATO bombings since 1999.

10 According to Ana, there seems to be a strong divide – a gap – within Serbia itself.

Serbia v. Serbia

15 “Serbia, especially the younger generation, has to fight against radical ideas. There’s a deep nostalgia in many Serbian hearts. A lot of people still linger on the idea of a greater
20 Yugoslavia but mourn its death. There’s also an astonishing amount of people who still believe that the independence of Kosovo cannot be given to what they consider the
25 decedents of the Turkish Empire,” deploras Ana. “Ethnic Albanians”, as the majority residents of Kosovo are called, are Muslim.

30 The Serbian Orthodox Church established itself in Pec, in the province of Kosovo, in 1331.

35 Later, during the famous Battle of Kosovo of 1389, the Serbian population, led by Lazar Hrebeljanović, fought – and, according to most historians, lost – against the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, this is
40 considered by Serbs the cradle of their civilization: they fought against the powerful invader, representing their courage.

45 “It was also a clash of two civilizations – the Muslim Orient and the Christian Europe,” says Aleksandar Mitic, founder of the Institute 4S, a think-tank on Serbian affairs in Brussels. The
50 Institute is an NGO aiming at

speeding-up the process of accession of Serbia to the EU.

55 But in the words of Sven Lindholm, the spokesperson for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “this once was Serbian Orthodox heartland.” According to him, things have changed since 1389.
60 “People move in, people move out,” and there are no Serbs in Kosovo anymore.

Ana and her friends are sitting at the university café. She comes to visit her friends every once in a while to talk about the last concert, the next party, or the new movie that just came out. The conversation switches to a
65 different tone after a while: “I think it’s time for us, young Serbs, to be more pragmatic about everything,” she says. The group seems to agree. The
70 consensus is that traveling restrictions are a burden that every young Serb would like to see disappear, and that new open-mindedness is maybe not shared with the older population. “My
75 mother speaks Serbian and Russian. She obviously doesn’t want to go
80 anywhere else because she doesn’t speak a word of English. It would be impossible for her to communicate.”

85 Serbia v. European Union

The freedom of movement that the younger and more educated portion of the Serb population would love to obtain could be granted by Serbia’s
90 accession to the European Union.

But many conditions remain to be filled for Serbia to become a member.
95 One of them is Serbian cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Mythical personalities accused of major war crimes like General Ratko
100 Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are still

on the run. They are believed to be hiding within Serbia, and even within Belgrade, according to Carla Del Ponte, the ICTY prosecutor.

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On the other hand, Mitic doesn't believe that the population is ready to fulfill all of these conditions. "It is clear that the Serbian society is divided

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over the issue of cooperation with the ICTY. The majority of Serbs see the ICTY as a biased, political institution, rather than a court," he says.

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The Serbian Radical Party, who defends populist and nationalist ideas, won 28.59% of the popular vote during the 2007 parliamentary election. On the other hand, 62% of the population thinks Serbian membership in the EU would be a good thing, according to a Gallup poll conducted in February 2007.

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On May 26, about 200 followers of the Radical Party demonstrated in favor of Mladic, who is considered as a hero.

Serbia v. Kosovo

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Another of the regular conditions imposed by the European Union to Serbia is the situation of Kosovo.

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According to the political leaders of Serbia, this is not a matter of divide in the Serbian society.

On February 14 2007, the Serbian parliament unanimously rejected the UN's proposal of supervised independence.

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On that very same day, the EU Council of Ministers somewhat approved of the parliament's decision, stating that "a solution should be reached on the basis of compromise," not independence.

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"In fact, Kosovo cannot be traded for easier visa access to European Union,"

says Mitic. "The EU has the same trade and legislative requirements for all potential country members - Serbia is no exception. So, letting Kosovo secede - which is problematic for many other reasons - would in no way automatically facilitate European integration."

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On the other hand, according to Lindholm, "you will have the [Serbian] politicians say one thing and then you will get something different when you speak to them in private. In reality many of them realize that Kosovo is lost. They're wondering, 'what can we gain from it?' But they can't say these things publicly, it would be very damaging to the government, and so they use it as a political tool, as a non-constructive opposition."

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"If the European Union would be a good thing to Serbs, accepting the independence of Kosovo is not a solution to most of the population because of the political mythology that has been created around the land," believes Ana. "On the other hand I have never been to Pristina (capital of Kosovo) and I don't believe any of my friends never went there."

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And if the European Union wants to lure Serbia into giving up things that are important to them in order to join the Union, "I believe that the EU "carrots" in general towards Serbia have been quite meager. Serbia has been cornered on many issues, so the sticks are there. But the carrots are always geared towards the [whole Balkan] region, not towards Serbia only."

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Where has the gap started?

Frustrations felt by the Serbian people concerning Kosovo and the European

Union divide the population in a radical way.

5 They are divided between the rich and the poor – something that they are not used to following Communism. “I live in an old flat and I don’t have enough money to have my own computer but I work in a skyscraper with state-of-the-art computers and high-speed internet access.” Such a divide has big implications in the popular morale, according to her.



In red: Serbia. In burgundy: Kosovo.

15 They are also divided by age. Ana was 18-years-old when NATO bombed Belgrade. This means that today’s 18-year-olds were ten when the war ended. The difference of attitude towards the once hated peoples is obvious. “How can you hate your neighbor because of his ethnicity when you are ten years old?,” asks Ana.

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25 They are divided by point of view. “There is someone I went to kindergarten with who is a member of the Radical Party. I don’t talk to him anymore,” adds Ana.

30 But they are also divided since the assassination of the ex-Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic. On 12 March 2003, the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party, was assassinated in Belgrade. He was a very strong leader. “The assassination was a cross-road for our generation. Since then, the Radical Party has been on the rise and peace seems to have taken a step back.”

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