



**Interfaith harmony is a key component of Kosovo's landscape**  
3 quick questions for Atifete Jahjaga, President of Kosovo

**KOSOVO NOW RECOGNISED BY 110 STATES**

**The Genesis of a Jewel**  
Kosovo's geological journey - from the Proterozoic to the prehistoric and beyond



# Kosovo's New Diplomat

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## Diversifying the priorities of Kosovo diplomacy

In the immediate aftermath of Kosovo's Declaration of Independence, Kosovar diplomats were focused towards achieving widest possible spectrum of bilateral recognitions. Today, Kosovo's diplomacy is diversifying portfolio

of international relations by lobbying for a prompt start of formal EU accession, membership to multilaterals and working with allies in global issues such as countering violent extremism or climate change.

**K**osovo is the youngest nation in Europe, born in 2008 after an extensive process of negotiations led by UN Envoy Marti Ahtisaari. Declaration of Independence was challenged in International Court of Justice, but ICJ gave a firm historic verdict that Kosovo's Declaration of Independence was not in breach of international law and relevant UN resolutions. This decision by ICJ prompted UN General Assembly to initiate the talks on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, thereby ending once and for all the chapter of status for Kosovo. I was the Prime Minister of the country when we declared to be a sovereign and independent republic and led the nation during the first stage of nation-building effort. The focus of our diplomacy was rather uniform and focused: to ensure that biggest possible number of countries recognize Kosovo on bilateral basis. This work was very successful as Kosovo is today recognized by 109 states.

We have signed hundreds of bilateral agreements with dozens of countries in the field of trade, investments, education, readmissions, mutual cancellation of visas, etc. enabling Kosovo to engage in the intricate web of relations with neighbors, EU partners as well as wider world. Kosovo's recognitions are global: from Australia and New Zealand to Norway and Iceland, from Japan to Senegal, most of the UN members now recognize Kosovo. Even the countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo, do recognize reality on the ground and engage with us and our citizens. Almost 180 countries now recognize Kosovo passport and other documents, hence we can proudly claim that Kosovo today is an established fact in the international community. I have led the talks between our country and our neighbors in Serbia to ensure normalization of relations. This led to historic Brussels Agreement in 2013, by which both countries agreed not to block each other

in EU path. This agreement showed that Kosovo is transforming itself from an importer of security resources to an exporter of peace initiatives. We are now rapidly entering a new age of Kosovo. Building institutions and solid foundations for economy is opening path for a further democratic consolidation of institutions and a more complex and competitive economic developments keen on attracting direct foreign investments. Our foreign policy is also changing - from an overwhelming focus on bilateral recognitions to engaging with friends in the multilateral world. In the recent months we have successfully become member of International Olympic Committee and observer members to Organization of Francophone Countries, while this year I have been focused to help Kosovo achieve as soon as possible a formal contract with EU, namely signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, the first step



**HASHIM THAÇI**  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER OF KOSOVO

towards becoming a part of EU family. European Commission has now approved the negotiated text of the SAA and we are eager to move on by signing the SAA, achieving a fundamentally important new cornerstone in our relations to the world. We are also working to complete the application procedure for membership to Council of Europe as well as UNESCO. Kosovo has become a sovereign member of "Bretton Woods UN agencies" such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund, but considering our young population, membership to UNESCO will provide our institutions new means to improve our education, science and culture, fields critical to overall human development. Kosovo is keen to play a positive part in ensuring stable, progressive and truly European future for all of the Balkans but is also seeking to use limited diplomatic resources to join those organizations that will benefit most the people of Kosovo from all ethnicities.

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## Diplomatic Bits & Pieces

### 3 QUICK QUESTIONS

ATIFETE JAHJAGA, PRESIDENT OF KOSOVO

# Interfaith harmony is a key component of Kosovo's landscape

## 1 How important is interfaith dialogue as a feature of Kosovo's public diplomacy engagement?

Inter-religious harmony is a key component of Kosovo's landscape and it is one of the values that we take great pride in. As such, this internal strength of harmony and tolerance - some of it traditional and some regulated by Kosovo's Constitution - has been a valuable asset of our foreign policy. We have been able to showcase our unique cultural mosaic abroad and have had a solid basis to invest in its preservation and continuation. Because Kosovo represents such a unique case, in recent years we have promoted it as an international hub for interfaith dialogue. That way Kosovo has not only set itself in the right path to earn its rightful recognition as a champion of interfaith dialogue in the region, but we have also managed to fight some of the misconceptions about our country.

Of course, to get to this point after a horrific war required hard work and commitment by the different faith communities to rebuild trust and to help the society heal and move on.

I have been encouraged by the readiness and openness of our faith communities to cooperate with each other, but to also bring forth the issues that are of concern to their respective followers.

It is precisely this model of Kosovo's resilience and the ongoing dialogue that has opened many doors, including a welcoming visit as the President of Kosovo to the Holy See and a chance to share this experience with the Holy Father Pope Francis earlier this year. On the basis of our common cultural traits built on the notions of peace and harmony that we seek to protect, we have been able to create important friendships that have secured Kosovo its place as an equal partner that contributes to find solutions to our common problems.

## 2 Kosovo endured a horrific war only 15 years ago. How satisfied are you with the process of normalization of relations communities and how protected are minorities in Kosovo?

Kosovo has made tremendous progress in weaving back its social fabric between the different ethnic communities as well as faith groups. We have provided many legal safeguards for the protection of the minorities and their way of life, including the places of worship, which add to our cultural treasure.



For example, we have extended property rights to the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the government of Kosovo has completed the rebuilding of the churches and other objects of cult that were damaged in the war's aftermath. Kosovo police has now replaced NATO peacekeepers in providing security to most of the monuments throughout Kosovo. Of course, a lot remains to be done, but we are committed to uphold the principles that lay at the foundation of our country.

We inherited a country destroyed, a land littered with the debris of shelled minarets and burned out churches, of communities estranged.

It has clearly been a learning process for all of us, and my belief and hope is that we have learned the lesson well. There is no more going back to the dark chapters of our history. We must seek justice and we must move forward.

## 3 What are your favorite heritage spots in Kosovo?

I've been welcomed to all faiths communities in Kosovo, which I have made a point of visiting for every major celebration, because I am a deep believer that by walking in the paths of those before us we stand to learn much about each other and are more likely to find commonalities that will bring us closer to celebrate our uniqueness. Is it unfair that my favorite heritage sites are in southwestern Kosovo? Çarshia of Gjakovë has definitely always had my heart, followed by the pristine monastery of Deçan, the Catholic cathedral in Prizren and the Tekke of Rahovec, which I had the pleasure to visit recently. Clearly, I admire these spots due to their amazing architectural value, but also due to their moving stories and the struggles of the communities in and around them to keep them - and the traditions they embed - standing.

## DIPLONEWS

FROM THE EMBASSIES



### Kosovo's Deputy PM meets leaders of the region

Following the 2014 national elections, Kosovo created a new government in the beginning of 2015 and the new Deputy PM and FM of the country is Hashim Thaci, former PM nominated for Nobel Peace Prize for his role in signing of the historic treaty with Serbia. Thaci in recent weeks met Presidents, Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Slovenia, Croatia, Turkey in a carefully calibrated tour that focused on supporting Kosovo's EU agenda. Thaci also hosted 6 foreign ministers in Prishtina for EU-sponsored conference on Western Balkans infrastructure projects. Serbia attended for the first time such a meeting in Kosovo.



### Deputy PM / FM Thaçi participates in Oslo Forum

Kosovo's Deputy PM and FM Hashim Thaci participates in Oslo Forum of Peacemakers in June together with other world leaders such as President of Columbia, Foreign Minister of Jordan, etc. Thaçi was in a panel with Baroness Ashton and PM Vucic of Serbia, discussing lessons learned from dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.



### New Kosovo Ambassadors named

Foreign Ministry of Kosovo has sent for Presidential approval the list of the new ambassadors that will represent Kosovo in several vacant posts. Leon Malazogu, with background from civil society will be proposed for Tokyo; Vlora Citaku, former EU minister and Consul General to New York will be proposed for Ambassadorial post in Washington DC; New ambassadors are also expected to be named for posts in Hungary, Montenegro, Canada as well as Consulate in Milano, Italy.



### Kosovo participating in 5th Global Forum Combating Antisemitism

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Petrit Selimi, had an official visit to Israel, where he participated at the 5th Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, at the invitation of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. The forum was opened by the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, while among the panelists were over 1000 guests from 40 countries from around the world. During this visit, Selimi also met with senior officials from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as executives from World Jewish Congress.



### Kosovo's Deputy Foreign Minister meets UNESCO delegations in Paris

Petrit Selimi, Kosovo's Deputy Foreign Minister was a frequent visitor to UNESCO headquarters during last few months. Namely, as Kosovo is vying for membership to the world body dedicated to cooperation in fields of education, science and culture, Selimi has been meeting national delegations to inform them of the situation in Kosovo as well as intentions of the country to apply for UNESCO membership in November 2015.

# NEW KOSOVO READS

EVERY ISSUE OF NEW DIPLOMAT WE WILL RECOMMEND BOOKS, REPORTS OR WEBSITES WITH INTERESTING AND UPDATED CONTENT ON KOSOVO.

**Title:** Digital Diplomacy: Conversations on Innovation in Foreign Policy  
**Publisher:** Rowman & Littlefield Publishers  
**Publication date:** 2015

Through conversations with State Department officials, ambassadors, public relations executives, public policy experts, and academics, Digital Diplomacy explores what it means to be innovative in foreign policy and

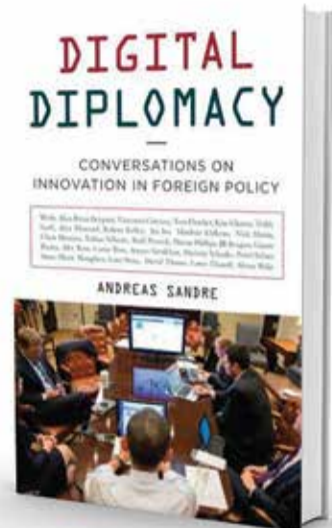
diplomacy. These leading experts explain what are the new dynamics, developments, trends, and theories in diplomacy brought on by the digital revolution in which non-state actors play an active role. Such access now provides diplomats the means to influence the countries they work in on a massive scale, not just through elites. The book's focus on innovative approaches shows how both public and

traditional diplomacy have been transforming foreign policy in the 21st century, highlighting new means and trends in conducting diplomacy and implementing foreign policy.

The enhanced e-book version features interviews with the experts who appear in the book, including Kosovo's Deputy Foreign Minister Petrit Selimi, one of the «digital pioneers» of Balkan foreign

ministries, Carne Ross, the «rock star» of digital diplomacy; Teddy Goff, the Digital Director for President Obama's 2012 Campaign; Lara Stein, Director of TEDx; Ambassador David Thorne, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State, and more.

This publication is written by Andreas Sandre, an Italian diplomat engaged in digital diplomacy in Italian Embassy in Washington DC.



## RECOGNMETER

KOSOVO IS NOW RECOGNIZED  
 BY 110 STATES ON BILATERAL  
 BASIS, WHILE WE HAVE ALSO  
 JOINED FRANCOPHONIE  
 AS OBSERVERS AND  
 INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC  
 COMMITTEE AS FULL  
 MEMBERS



Kosovo is now recognized by 110 states. On May 20, Antigua and Barbuda formally notified Kosovo authorities of its decision to recognize Kosovo as independent and sovereign republic, while on May 17th, Republic of Kosovo also signed formal bilateral relations with Cook Islands, a member of several UN agencies though not of UN itself. In recent months Kosovo also became member of International Olympic Committee as well as Organization of Francophone Countries.



## “Kosovo is going to Olympics and I will be carrying the flag”

When Majlinda Kelmendi carries her country's flag at the 2016 Olympics, her powerful fighter's shoulders will also bear the weight of expectation of a nation finally gaining recognition after being ripped apart by war.

The back of her judo outfit will display three letters that represent more than just a label of her origin -- but a bold statement of identity for a Balkan region battling for independence.

«When we got recognized by IOC, it was the best thing that happened to Kosovo,» the two-time world champion tells CNN's Human to Hero series.

Not just for sport but as a country, because now athletes and young kids can dream to be in the Olympics and represent Kosovo.

«It's such an honor for me because it's the first time that Kosovo is going to be in the Olympic Games, and it's going to be me who is holding the flag,» says the 24-year-old.

I have dreamed of this for a long time and finally it is coming.»

When Kelmendi won her first world title in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, it was a first for Kosovo -- which had been recognized by the International Judo Federation the previous year.

But when she defended her 52 kg crown in Russia last year, Kelmendi was forced to compete under «IJF» acronym because the host nation -- which supports Serbia's claims to Kosovo territory -- refused to recognize her homeland.

Her victory was bold defiance at a championships attended by Russian leader Vladimir Putin -- himself a noted black-belt judoka.

«We felt so bad but we were motivated to get a good result, and we did it -- Majlinda become double world champion exactly in Russia!» says her coach and mentor Driton Kuka.

«Me and my two older bro-

thers, we all train judo -- we are really in love with this sport,» Kuka says. «We wanted to achieve results to make our new country proud.»

With Kelmendi carrying the Kosovo flag at high-profile events such as this month's European Games in Baku -- where she did not compete because of injury -- and Rio 2016, British sports journalist James Montague says her success will boost the region's hope of securing widely-accepted independence.

«For her to win a gold medal and stand on that podium will send a massive message to the world,» Montague says.

«When I went to Kosovo in December when the IOC ratified the original decision to recognize it, I met the deputy foreign minister -- he said this was the most important day in Kosovo's history since the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008.»

Excerpts from CNN report

## Kosovo Diplomats & Kosovo Events



5,000 dresses were hung in Kosovo central stadium to remember women raped by Milosevic forces during 1999 war.

PHOTO: JETMIR IDRIZI

### 5,000 dresses transform soccer stadium in Kosovo into a venue for addressing wartime rape

This week, the City Stadium in Prishtina, Kosovo, has undergone an incredible transformation. Some 5,000 dresses hang in neat rows over the stretch of turf typically dominated by male athletes – a powerful visual reminder of an aspect of The Kosovo War that is seldom recognized or discussed.

In the years of conflict between the Albanian separatist group Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY, or Serbia and Montenegro), it is estimated that 20,000 Albanians, mostly women, were victims of sexual violence at the hands of the Serbian army, police, and paramilitaries. June marks the 16th anniversary of the end of the war, but discussing wartime sexual violence remains taboo. Hanging clean and crisp over the field, the dresses challenge that taboo, bringing new meaning to the idea of “airing one’s dirty laundry.”

Italian journalist and New School professor Anna Di Lellio, who has been working in Kosovo since the early 1990s, is the woman behind the project. Di Lellio teamed up with artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa to organize the exhibition. Kosovo’s president Atifete Jahjaga donated the first dress on May 8, 2015, and from there, thousands more were donated from people in cities across Kosovo and abroad. Di Lellio hopes the dresses will reduce the stigma that has surrounded and silenced victims of rape since the war’s end.

#### How has society in Kosovo dealt with wartime sexual violence in the aftermath of the war?

**Anna Di Lellio:** When the Albanians were expelled from Kosovo, women were taken aside and raped. But after the war, there were no prosecutions, until last year. So society really focused on surviving, rebuilding, and maintaining independence. After the war, what dominated was the narrative of the heroism of the KLA, which was true. They were fighters who sacrificed and fought, but there were also hundreds of thousands of civilians who suffered. And their suffering has never really been dealt with. There’s not much talk about it in society. They’ve forgotten what happened here. The women were the last to be talked about, because it is an intimate and delicate issue.

#### How have people in Kosovo responded to this project, and the idea of discussing sexual violence?

**AD:** There are lots of stereotypes of Kosovo being patriarchal, masculine, and more conservative culturally. It’s really only partly true. What we found in this campaign to collect dresses is that society is much more open than people suspected, and than we ourselves suspected or imagined. We even found a lot of acceptance in rural areas. Dresses were even donated from an office in the north of Kosovo, which is overwhelmingly Serbian. I was really impressed.

#### Where did the dresses come from, and how did you collect them for this installation?

**AD:** All the dresses are from people in Kosovo, and from women we know – activists, writers, and people who asked us if they could contribute. Even a Bosnian neighbor of one of my friends donated a dress. We got in touch with organizations that had been working with survivors since the end of the war, providing psychological and medical help. Then we got in touch with friends, acquaintances, activists. We held events in every city of Kosovo, and invited citizens to give us dresses. And we organized it with the president to start on May 8th, when she gave the first dress. As we were hanging the last dresses, people were coming to donate dresses.

#### What statement are you hoping these dresses make to the people of Kosovo?

**AD:** What the survivors have said is that they’re happy with this. That’s a big word, because they seem to feel that they’ll never be happy again. But they have been pleased. They said before this, “We talked about this issue only every once in a while, or never. Now we’ve been talking about this every day.” What they want is recognition, and not to have to hide or feel ashamed, but that’s how they’ve been feeling. From the point of view of survivors, we hear that this has made people talk about something that they’ve been keeping secret. The other thing is the impact of the size of it, if you think about what it means, the number of women who were raped during the war, provokes a really strong emotional reaction. /NYTIMES



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## NEW DIPLOMATS

Every issue we ask our diplomats three questions?

1. What do you do, where are you based?

2. What is the most you like about the job you do?

3. What is the best thing about the city you live in?

### AMBASSADOR VLORA ÇITAKU

1) I am the Council General of the republic of Kosovo in New York. It is a great honor and pleasure to both, represent our country in meetings with diplomats, but more importantly to be of service and help to our large and vibrant community living in USA

2) NYC is second to none. Every concept has a different meaning here, time has a different mea-

ning, space has a different meaning, distance has a different meaning. It is the most diverse city on the face of the earth, and it’s multiculturalism is reflected in all levels, from architecture to politics, food and fashion.

3) Although being miles away, being part of the diplomatic service enables you to help and serve your country. That’s what I love the most.

### AMBASSADOR LIRIM GREIÇEVCI

1) I am Kosovo’s Ambassador to the Court of St James’s in London. I also cover Ireland from London as a secondary appointment.

2) I am hugely proud to live and work in London, which is one of the oldest and most diverse cities in Europe. It is a cosmopolitan city, rich in culture and the birthplace of parliamentary democracy and rule of law. As a key member of NATO, the EU and Permanent Member of the UN, the UK has been one of the strongest supporters of Kosovo’s freedom and independence. Today, it is at the forefront of efforts for more recognitions and international integration for Kosovo. In Britain, I particularly admire the fascinating mix between tradition and modernity; the balance of power between a hereditary monarchy and an elected government by the

people; the political pragmatism, common sense and compromise, even in the absence of a written constitution; and of course, in my view, the best literature you could ever enjoy.

3) Being able to witness the birth of your country and playing a role, however small, as part of a dedicated team of young professionals team of diplomats, in Kosovo’s journey to full recognition, is the best honour, privilege and reward anyone can imagine in his or her diplomatic career. We should all be rightly proud of the success we have achieved so far, but there is a lot more to do ahead of us to make Kosovo a full member of NATO, the EU and of the UN family of nations. I believe in our joint dedication and efforts and in Kosovo’s bright future.

### EMANUEL GJOKAJ

1) I’m currently working at MFA as a consultant in Events management and Cultural affairs. I’m based in the capital of Kosovo, Prishtina.

2) Well, I used to live in New York City for over a decade before moving back to Prishtina, but what I like about this city is the diversity of young people that live here, it is inexpensive to live and food is great. Nightlife starts around 10 pm and ends around 4-5 am. It’s politically stable country and safer than NYC. I like the fact that few hours on the plane will take you to any city in Europe you desire. Plenty of activities to do from hiking, skiing and seaside just few hours away.

3) I just joined the team at Kosovo MFA so plenty of new moments and experiences in this job. I like learning new things. In my previous job I had in a corporate world, the company culture was great, they paid a lot of attention on individual development including professional improvement and career growth and I have learnt a lot but now I also have to give back not only to the company but also to the entire nation. More responsibility rests on our shoulders. I have to say challenges and opportunities are greater here and I am looking for something like that, therefore I can stretch my limits and really conquer my flaws and my fears.”



# The Genesis of a Jewel

Kosovo's geological journey - from the Proterozoic to the prehistoric and beyond.

By Marc Perry

Kosovo's high circles of surrounding mountains, fertile plains and central spine of low rolling hills have been built over eons of geological time. Not only did significant geo-tectonic events define the distinct geographic dominion that is today's Kosovo but they also laid down the resources that have sustained numerous waves of competing armies and empires with expanding interests.

The oldest rocks in Kosovo are concentrated in the North East with scatterings isolated in smaller pockets elsewhere. Their geogenic journey started 1000 – 570 million years ago when the earth was gripped, like a snowball, in the most severe glaciation on geological record. Strata formed by ice and fire would lay down the continental bedrock of Kosovo, only to be drowned out millions of years later.

240 to 66 million years ago, when dinosaurs dominated life on earth, Kosovo was, for the most part, under water. Metallic ores that went on to form such an intriguing part of Kosovo's human history originated at these times. They are part of rich strip of related rocks that extend from the western Med, across the Alps, Caucasus, Hindu Kush and Tibet all the way to Indonesia. Lead, the metal that went on to fuel Yugoslav car batteries and the roofs of Byzantine Churches and Ottoman Hamams, formed when molten liquids spewed into what would then have been a shallow sea known as the Vardar Ocean. Limestone that today can be bought at the side of the road for making ornamental fountains, developed from the accumulated shells of billions of crustaceans bedded down in warm waters. Later those same shells would metamorphose under great pressure into the marbles that would line the floors of what are today's state buildings.

Towards the end of the dinosaur era, when mammals first

started appearing, the sea that covered Kosovo would retreat as flanking tectonic plates of Africa and India collided with Euro-Asia. Veins of Gold, Zinc, Lead and Silver developed where rocks, brought together by the collision, merged together under great pressure and terrific heat.

The same forces that formed gold would keep pushing to produce mountains; and the consequent Alpine mountain building period would push up Kosovo's plethora of peaks well beyond today's 2000m.

The circle that is Kosovo had been created, but the people had not arrived; in fact they had not even evolved. They would not appear for another 65,955,000 years.

In the meantime the mountains would be eroded down by weathering and water, into sediments that would settle to produce rich soils for luxuriant plant growth. Lignite, the fuel that powers 97% of Kosovo's electricity generation, was laid down by the accumulation and subsequent decay of this fertile vegetation in sedimentary basins.

The flat lands of Kosovo, created by the constantly changing course of rivers and shallow lakes levelling the landscape, would start to take form. Forests covered the fertile floor but mountaintops would be stripped of soil by a period of glaciation during an ice age we are, technically speaking, still in.

As the ice receded man would arrive in hunter-gathering tribes some 45,000 years ago. By the New Stone Age women were playing a leading role in artistic expression and numerous human shaped terracotta figurines, some represented as pregnant women were being crafted in their hands. The most famous of them all, "The Goddess on the Throne," has come to represent the place she was found, Prishtina.

Over millennia life carried on in a slow evolution of settlement, farming and increasing so-

phistication through the Copper, Bronze and Iron ages. By the Iron Age burial mounds indicate hierarchies had developed. Then, in the 1st century AD, Romans, who eventually formed a province where Illyrian tribes of Dardania lived, conquered the region.

These metallic ages, from copper to Iron, evolved as man turned his hand to shaping and subduing natural ores. Base-metal mining has been a mainstay of the economy ever since, with Illyrians, Romans, Byzantines, Serbs, Saxons, Turks, French, Britons and modern miners all undertaking extensive extraction. In medieval times a traveller recorded that King Stefan Uroš II Milutin kept several silver mines including one at Gracanica. The "third great Balkan Silver long cycle," (1395 to 1566) would line the coffers not just of his lineage but also of the dynasties' conquerors – the Ottoman Sultans. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent would mine 11,000 Kg of silver from Kosovo in a single year. Rich pickings indeed, for an Empire that would rule with steady stealth and careful strategy for nigh on 500 years.

Jewellery from prehistoric bangles, to fine Ottoman earrings is the legacy of man's inventiveness in the region. The silver and gold mined over millennia can still be seen in the national museum, or in the crafted trinkets and ornaments of the Nemanjic era and Ottoman ages. But, their external beauty belies a deeper conception, when the sea that covered Kosovo had only just receded, when early mammals had just taken their first lung full of air, and veins that glimmered, just like gold, precipitated precious metals out hot fluid rock.



Images of diverse minerals from Kosovo mines.



Jewellery from prehistoric bangles, to fine Ottoman earrings is the legacy of man's inventiveness in the region.



— INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN TIME OF SOCIAL MEDIA,  
ENABLING AGENTS OF CHANGE, COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM  
KOSOVO 28-30 MAY 2015 —

# Kosovo fights extremism with Social Media

By Stephen Schwartz, Executive Director, Center for Islamic Pluralism

The Balkan republic of Kosovo, with an overwhelming Muslim majority and a median age of 27, has committed itself to a consequential struggle against radical Islam. While some Kosovo Muslims are numbered in the ranks of the so-called “Islamic State” (ISIS), the Kosovo government has criminalized participation in and recruitment for jihad.

Additionally, the Kosovo authorities have hosted a series of annual conferences bringing together Muslim, Christian, and other global spiritual leaders against religious bigotry. This year, the topic of the event was “Interfaith Dialogue in a Time of Social Media: Enabling Agents of Change, Countering Violent Extremism and Hate Speech.”

Benefiting from entrepreneurship, foreign assistance, and the enthusiasm of its youthful population for social media, Kosovo is an ideal European -- and Muslim -- location for a campaign to oppose Islamist ideology using new and popular means. While many observers credit ISIS with clever use of social media, the Kosovo government is matching and outwitting them.

In her introductory address at the 2015 conference, Kosovo President Atifete Jahjaga praised “representatives of different faiths and people who have dedicated their lives to the power of spiritual union ... to demonstrate the value of interfaith and ecumenical dialogue ... [and] the importance of interfaith tolerance.”

She explained, “This is an added value [for] Kosovo’s society, which has gone through difficult times.... The tradition of religious coexistence cultivated throughout the entire history of this place [is] ingrained in our Constitution ... mak[ing] Kosovo a place of diversity and peacekeeping.”

More bluntly, Kosovo Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hashim Thaçi, in a message to participants in the event, stated, “Kosovo has approved ... [a] law

against foreign fighters to stem participation on [the side of ISIS] in Syria and Iraq.” The law provides for sentences up to 15 years in prison “for those participating and instigating participation in [the] bloody conflict in the Middle East.”

Thaçi continued, “Kosovo police and prosecutors have arrested and brought charges against almost 100 suspected foreign fighters as well as some individual imams who have been advocating for ISIS.” Certain imams have been charged with money laundering. Thaçi declared that Deputy Foreign Minister Petrit Selimi “has been at the forefront of using digital diplomacy to engage international audiences with the new Kosovo as well as to counter the extremist message from nationalist and religious fanatics.”

Thaçi noted proudly that 85 percent of Kosovo households have broadband Internet access, “which makes Kosovo a particularly fertile soil for new platforms of interaction with young audiences.”

Kosovo’s efforts in this area include support for smaller religious communities such as the Kosovo Jews and the Bektashi Sufis, as well as Instagram competitions, sponsored by the Norwegian government, and Wikipedia training camps for children.

At the 2015 conference, Deputy Foreign Minister Selimi described the Interfaith Kosovo initiative by the government of the republic as “a native response to global challenges.” Interfaith Kosovo was launched four years ago, with Kosovo as a basis for in-depth discussion and development of “cutting-edge tools in promoting interfaith dialogue ... to resolve religious differences that in recent years evolved into violent extremism.”

Interfaith Kosovo launched a multilingual Web portal, [interfaithkosovo.org](http://interfaithkosovo.org), followed by such programs as a workshop on the Jewish heritage of Kosovo, placement of a monument to victims of the Holocaust in the garden of the Ko-



Interfaith Kosovo Initiative is supported by both civil society, faith communities as well as the government and is best described as a native response to global challenges.”

sovo parliament, lectures, books, support for blogs, and an annual summer school.

In 2014 participants of the annual interfaith conference, held in the historic multiethnic city of Prizren, formalized Interfaith Kosovo as a nonprofit, the International Institute for Interfaith Dialogue.

Selimi emphasized that Kosovo is a “secular, democratic society” but is “still not healed from [the] wounds of war.” Unfortunately, he said, “it is certainly not immune to

the global threat posed by violent extremism.”

This year’s conference book included wise counsels by participants in past events. Uniquely in the world, a prominent place was granted to representatives of the metaphysical Islamic Sufi communities of Kosovo. Baba Mumin Lama of the Bektashi Community in the Kosovo city of Gjakova said, “The limits of life are immeasurable, too wide, and the people are the ones who move in this wideness. Therefore, today we must perfect ourselves, to debate freely our own ideas, or our own religious choices, without feeling hurt.”

Sheikh Lulzim Shehu, a representative of the Union of Sufi Tarikats of Kosovo, adapted a comment by the scholar Philip Jenkins: “Through its poetry, music, dance, unique aesthetic sensibility, advocacy of peace, love, and mystical quest, the Sufi tradition seeks and celebrates direct love and communion with God, which mirrors a deep connection with one’s own humanity.”

Interfaith Kosovo is leading the way in responding to radical Islam and other problems of religious life. / HUFFINGTON POST



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— INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN TIME OF SOCIAL MEDIA,  
ENABLING AGENTS OF CHANGE, COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM  
KOSOVO 28-30 MAY 2015 —



# Kosovo's Road to Multiculturalism

By Ian Linden, Senior Advisor at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation

In the centre of Prishtina, Kosovo's main city, there is a wide pedestrian boulevard parallel with the bustling lines of cars on Agim Ramadani street, where people promenade. It has the languor of a small Mediterranean town on a sunny Sunday afternoon. It is lined this time of year with strawberries piled high. Stall after stall. There are the occasional signs for honey between the long lines of punnets brimming with ripe, red soft fruit. Five minutes away is an exquisite 14th century mosque still in use.

Political scientists need labels and categories and "post-conflict society" is one of them. But you could be forgiven for thinking it does not feel quite right for Kosovo in the early Summer sunshine. Yet, as with Northern Ireland, a young government's firm intention of reconciliation confronts the realities of lingering social hostilities, stereotyping and insecurity, and, for Europe, an unusually young population who want things to change fast.

It was the high percentage of young people at Kosovo's annual interfaith gathering last month that struck me most. The theme was social media and they tweeted their way into the top ten trending in the USA for one hour during the proceedings. No mean feat. They were very clear that their parents' legacy of inter-ethnic and inter-religious hostility was a problem they wanted sorted out. In this they had the support of the - also youthful - civil servants from the Kosovo Foreign Service and the International Insti-

tute for Interfaith Dialogue who had invited them.

It was refreshing to have alongside religious leaders speakers such as Monica Bickert, head of product policy at Facebook, and Harold Hyman, editor and geopolitics expert from BFMTV, France's largest news channel. The convenor power of the government of this small, predominantly Muslim, Balkans country is no less impressive than its insight that championing interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism is an effective deployment of soft power. The vast Roman Catholic cathedral dedicated to Mother Teresa, almost finished but looking raw, (her family moved to Kosovo from Albania) was some testimony to this commitment, as was the beautifully preserved Orthodox 14th century monastery and church in the town's suburbs, a UNESCO heritage site. No-one had touched it during the war. Other churches had suffered badly.

Commitment to multiculturalism in Europe has come under threat as European societies react to terrorist threats and a small number of their citizens that have left for Syria to join Da'esh. The Kosovo government has experienced the same phenomenon on top of facing the immediate task of nation-building. It faces a strong headwind against the course it has been charting, trying to establish religious pluralism on sound foundations. The country's religious leaders also face significant new challenges.

But throughout Europe, the middle-aged men with beards- studying

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texts- having shared meals-and being nice to each other-practice of interfaith dialogue is correspondingly called into question. Has it not entrenched patriarchal authority structures? "What is the point?" "They go back and nothing changes". And so on.

But this is not a fair account of what the Kosovo government is achieving, or of the action-oriented nature of much interfaith dialogue today, which balances talking with doing. Too often it can be contrasted with the hands-on tough love work of CVE, Countering Religious Extremism. Often, though, its very practice, the threat of a good example, is driving a cart and horses through extremist narratives. The two are not mutually

exclusive. Inter-religious dialogue is not a one - off inoculation rather it slowly builds up the immune system, building resilience to extremist narratives and proselytism.

It is too easy to laugh at, caricature and dismiss religious leaders today. True, in the main, they have little idea about effective use of social media for their religious messages. But that is more age-related than religion-related. A tweet from the Pope is front-page news. But for the past decade they have had a slew of new demands and expectations heaped on them with negligible resources with which to respond. That South Asian imams with a poor education and poor Islamic formation look, and sound, lost and defensive, when they are supposed to become overnight CVE warriors, is hardly surprising.

The national haemorrhaging of young recruits to the Da'esh charnel house has given a degree of urgency. But the absorption of liberal democratic ideas and new responsibilities by religious leaders takes time. The intuition that young people need to be at the front-line of countering religious extremism makes interfaith in Kosovo exciting and should be made into the country's premier export. The young women in white dresses with dark flowing tresses - well some - the handsome young men at their side, strolling together past the line of strawberry stalls, are Kosovo's most sophisticated weapon against Da'esh's modern death-cult.

So cut the religious leaders a little bit of slack. / HUFFINGTON POST

# Thirty One

bazuar në konceptin për një ekspozitë të ardhshme të /  
based on a concept for a future exhibition of  
the Kontakt Art Collection

17.06.—  
21.07.2015



Galeria Kombëtare e Kosovës  
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# Kontakt Art Collection

nga / by Petrit Halilaj & Hans Ulrich Obrist  
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