

BRIEF ANALYSIS

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WHAT WENT WRONG WITH **UNESCO** MEMBERSHIP



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Introduction

Last November (2015) Kosovo failed to become member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO. This was the gravest diplomatic and foreign policy failure of the young state. It arrived after a series of victories in international arena and 111 recognitions by different countries of the world. But what happened? What caused Kosovo's limping? Was it rather a failure of Kosovo or victory of Serbia?

This brief analysis aims to answer several questions on what exactly happened on “Kosovo's first journey” towards UNESCO membership, to explain what exactly went wrong. All while aiming to identify the mistakes and propose how to avoid their repetition. It also aims to propose what could Kosovo do differently when the next application for candidacy to this important global organization is to be repeated.

Key question in the debate is whether Kosovo should attempt membership in the first next opportunity. What if it is to fail again? In fact, there is a long list of questions to be answered before the final decision. One of them is fundamental: What has changed on science and culture within the respective period to convince members of UNESCO to change position in favor of Kosovo?



Kjo analizë është përgatitur për Forumin 2015 në kuadër të projektit “EC për qytete transparente dhe gjithëpërfshirëse”, i përkrahur financiarisht nga Fondacioni i Kosovës për Shoqëri të Hapur. Përmbajtja dhe qëndrimet e shprehura në këtë publikim i përkasin autorit dhe organizatës jo-qeveritare EC Ma Ndryshe.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Indirect Reasons

- **Lack of new recognitions**

Though 111 countries of the world have recognized its statehood, Kosovo's overall image abroad leaves to be desired. During Hashim Thaci's leadership, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had secured only two new recognitions. It was said that the energy has been directed towards membership into international organizations.

- **The Special Court**

Hashim Thaçi's name continues to be linked to "organ trafficking" as a war crime that was first mentioned in the Dick Marty's report, member of Council of Europe Assembly, and later in the reputable world media. Kosovo opened way to creation of a Special Court, the President ratified the agreement with Netherlands for Special Court of Kosovo dislocated in the Netherlands. The court, expected to finally clean-up KLA's fight, has not started work yet.

- **Diplomatic Scandals**

Overall, a number of scandals have spotted Kosovo's diplomacy: employment of family members and political militants close to parties in the governing coalition; scandalous and unprofessional behaviour by diplomatic staff [Urtak Hamiti's case in Croatia]; a diplomat's insult of Slovenian citizens'; the official's feet on the desk while she served citizens in Embassy of Kosovo to Switzerland; suspicious recognitions from Africa; physical attack by the First Secretary of the Embassy in Berlin, Fatmire Musliu, against Ambassador Vilson Mirdita; Ambassador Shpend Kallaba's abuses of funds and state wealth; untimely and unprocedural withdrawal of the Ambassador to Japan, Ahmet Shala; charges against a staff member on the grounds of having harassed sexually Japanese women...]

- **Political Stalemate**

A number of internal political problems have challenged Kosovo from the moment of application to UNESCO to present. Political parties in power and in opposition have failed to find common grounds for overcoming the political stalemate in the country. The stalemate leaves a bitter taste as it brings to surface political instability of the country. It was a mistake not to develop bilateral diplomacy with countries that had recognized statehood. The recognition of a country sufficed for the government and it did not maintain diplomatic communication with many of the countries.

- **Offguard votes**

In the final decision Kosovo got 92 votes in support of, 50 against, and 29 abstentions. Only three votes were needed to meet the threshold. Among the countries that did not vote in favor there were three friendly countries of Kosovo, Poland, Japan, and South Korea, which have already recognized its independence. Few examples mentioned above touch upon Kosovo's relation with Japan. Poland is one of the recognizing countries to which Kosovo has not designated an ambassador.

Direct Reasons

- **Uncertainties surrounding application**

The initial narrative discussed during last year, was that the application was to be submitted through UNMIK, and that relevant preparations are underway. A number of bureaucratic difficulties emerged on this route. The alternative solution was to submit the application through state of Albania, an UNESCO member. In the end, it was concluded that Kosovo should apply directly, without any intermediation. The uncertainties and shifts within a short period of time highlighted the shortage of an initial strategy. Kosovo was embarking on an adventure without any guarantees.

- **“Hop, but don't jump!”**

Since the initiation of the journey to membership in UNESCO in July 2015, the media and propaganda boom were huge. Although the process leadership referred to it as 'a tough battle,' Kosovo was taking membership for granted, especially after organization's Executive Council approved its application. Leaders of the lobbying team, in charge of the process, cynically referred to those who suspected team's capabilities to secure Kosovo membership in UNESCO. The social networks of the foreign minister Hashim Thaci and his deputy Petrit Selimi were optimistic. On the other hand, both left an impression that they were to capitalize this “success under making.”

- **Privatization and Silence**

The bad news silenced Kosovo and those directly in charge. After the year-long campaign failed, no one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took claimed responsibility. Instead of accounting for the failure, Hashim Thaci, treated the defeat as a victory, highlighting the quality of the votes (total 92 out of 95 needed) rather than explaining the unaccomplished goal. In some way, the very Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its leadership had owned the entire process, not only in their public declaration, but throughout the journey. The Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology had not even made a single public statements on the “battle.”

- **Lack of coordination**

Throughout its duration, the process lacked good coordination of all institutional and non-institutional actors. The Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport was insufficiently involved. So were the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Kosovo, the University of Prishtina, and institutions of culture heritage and science. Civil society organizations had not been invited to participate in the drafting of a clear lobbying strategy, which would prepare grounds for a certain membership.

- **Poor lobbying**

Kosovo's lobbying for UNESCO membership was rather technical and political in nature/content. In fact, it was limited to lobbying within the organization's premises in France and support provided by friendly countries rather than on Kosovo's substantial offer towards protection of cultural heritage and advancement of science. Also, the political lobbying part had serious shortages. One of the least meaningful acts to this end was the appearance of Kosovar businessman Behxhet Pacolli in UNESCO premises few days before the scheduled voting session. Finally, the very few actions taken were rather reaction to Serbia's actions than well-thought lobbying initiatives.

- **Relying on friends**

Majority of votes, in support of Kosovo membership, were confirmed to friendly countries and not to Kosovo directly. The data indicate that very few countries offered their support to Kosovo officials, who extensively lobbied throughout UNESCO's halls in Paris. Deputy Prime Minister Hashim Thaci had received only one confirmation vote, from the Solomon Islands. According to the government documents, the President Atifete Jahjaga received also one confirmation vote, from Republic of Central Africa. However, the latter abstained during voting. The officials leading the process frequently referred to the support of friendly countries as the strongest argument, implying that powerful states had guaranteed successful completion of the membership process.

- **Without cultural diplomacy**

Kosovo's campaign for UNESCO membership was initiated late. There were no activities (promoting documentaries, facts, books) in support of the process. Inva Mula and Rita Ora, few prominent figures, were involved later, though the process could have benefitted from many other well-known names working abroad. Cultural diplomacy was almost completely put on the sidelines and many well-known names from the world of arts, who live abroad, were not invited at all to contribute.

- **[Un]Prepared materials**

A wider impression created was that beside the process the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had privatized the lobbying materials as well. Striving to come across as affirmative in its approach, the Ministry ignored important facts from the past. The leaflets published for the campaign purpose showed Hashim Thaci, Petrit Selimi, and a recent reproduction of the Goddess on the Throne, in giant proportions and lacking any archeological and historic value. Designing catalogues is not Ministry's responsibility. Proper experts should be engaged instead.

- **Degraded cultural heritage**

Kosovo has a very good legislation on cultural heritage but lags behind in its implementation, as in many other laws. Many objects of cultural heritage are being destroyed in front of the government's eyes. Many mechanisms are dysfunctional (National Council for Cultural Heritage became functional few years after its establishment and there is a huge shortage of professional staff in the Regional Centers for Cultural Heritage). Cultural heritage properties still lack permanent protection. Pro-active promotion of Kosovo's cultural tourism and cultural diversity has never been a case. Not even Kosovars themselves are able to recognize country's own monuments. In general, the institutions were inept at promoting them to the world. Vast monuments lack adequate directional signs. The overall management of the cultural heritage leaves much to be desired.

- **Science and education put on the sidelines**

Another shortcoming of the first UNESCO application process was investing entire energy on cultural heritage, and putting education and science on total sidelines, despite important mandates the organization has on these two fields. Moreover, tens of non-cultural heritage programs of UNESCO have not been reviewed nor utilized to promote the competitive advantage of Kosovar society and state.

- **Aggressive Campaign**

Compared to Kosovo, Serbia's campaign was very aggressive. State, religious, and academic institutions coordinated joint efforts. They campaigned "No Kosovo in UNESCO." Politicians lobbied not in margins, but through diplomatic networks of their embassies to gain votes against Kosovo. They wrote letters to whoever could be considered important to obstruct the process. They continuously reminded Ban Ki-Moon that "Kosovo, as a territory under the UN's administration, in line with the current and legally binding UN [Security Council] Resolution 1244, cannot be subject to international law, and thereby it cannot qualify for admission into UNESCO. "Based on a single graffiti written by an unknown author, they compared Kosovo and Kosovars to ISIS and terrorists. The Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences had written letters to the similar academies throughout the world stating that it is proving the perils of changes in the context of cultural heritage in Kosovo. Serbia continued its tradition to propagate grounded on history, which is considered largely fraudulent by science based on facts and evidence. Father Sava Janjic demanded postponement of Kosovo's application until "Belgrade and Prishtina finally clarify the institutional mechanisms for protection of our churches in Kosovo, with all international guarantees, as part of the Brussels sponsored dialogue. He claimed that "this should happen in order to protect our churches from becoming prey of nationalist aggression, since Kosovo's current legislation is not very clear and could be subjected to unilateral changes." He would recall the destruction of 34 objects during March 2004. Further, Serbia had called for a "wide Christian front against Kosovo." Kosovo's domestic and foreign policy almost totally ignored Serbia's campaign.

- **Violation of Agreement**

Obstacles that Serbia was openly posing to Kosovo's path to UNESCO membership were taking place after parties had agreed in Brussels for good neighborly and normalized relations. Regarding the 14th point of April 19, 2013 agreement, parties had initially discussed the option of not obstructing each other's membership into international organizations, including Kosovo's membership to the UN. Serbia did not approve such option. 14th point of the agreement states that "it is agreed that neither side will block, or encourage others to block, the other side's progress in their respective EU paths." Nevertheless Serbia's obstruction to Kosovo's path to UNESCO has passed without notice and critique. But that was all. "UNESCO case poses a dilemma on how successful this dialogue is. That is because Serbia's actions against Kosovo's efforts to join UNESCO were not conducted in positive spirit. On the contrary, several representatives of government of Serbia have displayed high level of hatred, which is very contradictory to what Serb representatives display when they sit on the same table with representatives of the Government of Kosovo. Implementation means implementing every agreement reached by the parties" Ulrike Lunacek had stated in an interview for Belgrade media.

- **New talks**

Serbia is interested to bring back the cultural heritage issue to talks with Kosovo, facilitated by the EU and taking place in Brussels. Serbia intends to exceed the Annex 5 of Ahtisaari Plan, to demand further advancement of this religious institutions' position, already overly-pampered. Through this, it aims to free it entirely from Kosovo laws, cutting off any official communication and creating a new political and legal reality in the country, implying a totally independent entity, or a kind of "state within a state."

- **Four Orthodox Monuments**

Serbia's first victory with Kosovo monuments took place in 2006 when she succeeded to include as her own four Kosovo monuments to the UNESCO's World Heritage List (Patriarchate of Peja, Church of Saint Friday, Monastery of Decan, and Monastery of Gracanica). Failing to communicate with Kosovo institutions and to respect the laws in place, Patriarchate of Peja had received a new exterior, in continuous efforts to distort history. Patriarchate has lost its bizantine look!

- **March 2004 bill**

Although it has already paid excessively for March 2004 riots, the state of Kosovo continues to pay continuous bill through Serbia's propaganda diplomacy. About 6 million euros of Kosovo taxpayers' money have already been invested in the monuments of orthodox cultural heritage. 200 charges have been filed against protesters. 143 persons have been sentenced to jail. 67 have received 1 year imprisonment sentences, but there are few cases when perpetrators were sentenced with up to 16 years. Without tending to justify those actions, it must be stated that state of Kosovo has distanced itself from the riots.

- **War 1998/99 damages**

On the other hand, no one ever made a mention about damages that Serbia caused to Kosovo's cultural heritage. During the last war of 1998/99 about 200 mosques have been burnt down. Majority of the mosques were built during the Ottoman Empire. The old bazaars of Peja, Gjakova, and Vushtri were totally destroyed. Libraries, archives, and meytops were burnt. Numerous kullas of monumental value were also destroyed. In addition, Serbia continues to hold in its possession 1243 archeological and ethnological artefacts of Kosovo, which its army and administration plundered before withdrawing in June 1999. Only Goddess on the Throne has been returned to its origins. Kosovo decided not to mention these facts at all during her lobbying for UNESCO membership, although the acts had been committed by Serbia's state apparatus of the time.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this year's first quarter, there is no clear decision whether Kosovo should re-embark on a new process of application for UNESCO membership next year. Apparently this will depend on the political will of the upcoming Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Government of Kosovo. Key question of the debate is whether Kosovo should attempt membership in the first next opportunity. What if it fails again? In fact, there is a long list of questions to be answered before the final decision. One of them is fundamental: What has changed on science and culture within the respective period to convince members of UNESCO to change position in favor of Kosovo?

Nevertheless, whenever it decides so, it should consider several aspects:

- To work towards improvement of Kosovo's image in the world. Past scandals must be amended and their repetition must not be allowed.
- To guarantee that it is ready to protect its cultural heritage, including orthodox. To this end, parties that cause damage to cultural heritage must be punished accordingly as provided by the law.
- UNESCO application process must not be owned by one or the other ministry. Many stakeholders must be engaged in the process, including experts and civil society representatives.
- Kosovo must adopt a platform of joint action, which will engage all and start preparations for the next application now
- Lobbying cannot be only technical and political, but substantial, with well-prepared materials based on historic evidence and arguments

- Serbia's aggressive campaign, which continues to this day, must not be let go without a counter-response. Kosovo possesses many evidence-based arguments to devalidate such manipulations, whose primary goal is to block Kosovo's membership and not to genuinely protect property of Orthodox Church in Kosovo.

Failure to become member of UNESCO has been Kosovo's gravest diplomatic failure since declaration of independence in 2008. The young state cannot afford failing twice!



Organizata Jo-qeveritare
Emancipimi Civil Ma Ndryshe

EC is a community organization, founded in 2006, committed to the advancement of democracy in Kosovo at the local level. The Organization works with a considerable number of community groups, and maintains constant pressure on the local governments for inclusive, transparent and accountable governance. EC engages in civic action for shaping our living environment by fostering genuine community organization, democratization of institutions and enrichment of cultural life in the key centers of Kosovo, focusing on Prizren and Pristina. Since January 2015, EC operates the following three programs: Inclusive City (Community Mobilization), Good Governance (Monitoring and Advocacy), Research (Knowledge Production).

EC's differentiating features are: first, geographic focus, and second, approach to issues of interest. Based in Prizren and Pristina, the organization uses the anthropological approach to research and policy development. As a result, the organization's research products provide reliable content, since they deal with the essence of the problem rather than the symptoms. Further, EC covers specialty areas such as urban planning, cultural policies, public space management, and alike, which in general remain under-addressed in Kosovo. The organization's research activity and grassroots activism are well-combined and interdependent work methods. Through activism, EC is permanently involved in working with community groups to identify their needs, which are the sources feeding its research component. This methodology enables greater influence over the policy-making agenda, as ideas are coming from the bottom, along with creating opportunities for the inclusion of policymakers in a constructive and well-informed debate.

The Organization's main projects in the recent years: Prizren, a barrier-free city (2016–2017), The Inclusive City – active neighbourhoods for sustainable urban development in Prizren (2016–2020), Urban Planning and Development School (2015–2016), EC for Transparent and Inclusive Cities (2015–2016), Municipal Transparency Reform Index (2015–2016), Urbanism Watch – Urbanism of Prizren under Scrutiny (2013–2016), Cultural and Urban Activism in Prizren (2014–2015), Inclusive City – Participatory Planning for Sustainable Urban Development in Prizren (2013–2015), Linking Communities to Justice Providers (2014–2016), Regional Development through Cultural Tourism (2014–2015), Citizen Participation through Social Media (2013–2014), Cultural Heritage, the Central Pillar for Sustainable Local and Regional Development in Prizren (2013–2014), Citizen Participation in the Drafting Cultural Policies in Prizren Municipality (2012–2013), Online Transparency of Prizren, Mamusha and Prishtina Municipalities (2012–2015), A Balkans Tale (2011–2012), Civic Action in Protecting Cultural Heritage (2009–2010).

The Organization's most recent publications: Cultural heritage, an untold story (2016), Millions spent on closed monuments (2016), A City for the Community (2015), Beautiful and Green - Catalog of the Region South (2015), Erasing the Traces – Historic Centers of Kosovo (2015), Protection and Promotion of Cultural Heritage (Input for the Progress Report) (2015), (in)Justice in Urbanism of Prizren (2015), Community Groups and Urban Planning in Prizren (2015), Prizren Region Catalog (2015), Urban Planning for Citizens (2014), Countdown to Last Days for the Historic Center of Prishtina (2014), Where Is Prizren's Cobblestone? (2014), Public Money as “Dad's Money” (2014), Guide to Municipal Transparency (2014), Historic Center of Prizren, (un)Protected Area (2014), Reading the City through Urbanism (2014).