



The role and impact of media in divided societies and conflict-ridden democracies: the case of the conflict over Kosovo

Athens, 9-11 March 2011

Research note

The Western Balkans is a priority for EU foreign policy. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Baroness Catherine Ashton often underlines the importance attributed by Europe on the area. On 19 February 2011, for instance, she asserted: ‘This region is a priority for me. We want to ensure that we are offering cooperation and support’. On that basis it is certainly of increased significance that Serbia and Kosovo have entered since March 2011 a negotiation process under the umbrella of the EU on issues related to their European orientation and every-day problems.

At a critical juncture for the Western Balkans, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) organised a workshop from 9 until 11 March 2011 with young Serb and Kosovar-Albanian journalists. This event took place in Athens within the context of the project “Early Warning: from Analysis to Action”, which is financed by the European Union and coordinated by International Alert. Along with ELIAMEP, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (Belgrade) and the Foreign Policy Club (Prishtina) contributed to the organization of the workshop in Athens.

Keynote speakers were Mr. Telemachos Hitiris (Alternate Minister of Culture and Tourism in Greece) and Professor Zan Zielonka (Univeristy of Oxford). Dr. Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos and Dr. George Tzogopoulos acted as conveners of this workshop. The event was mainly based on a systematic exchange of views among journalists from the two sides of the Kosovo conflict. To this effect discussion was structured in six different stages guided by various scholars and journalists. These included: Professor Stylianos Papathanassopoulos (University of Athens), Mr. Tassos Telloglou (Journalist, *Kathimerini*), Ms. Astrid Reinprecht (Doctoral Researcher, European University Institute), Ms. Sonja Licht (President, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence), Dr. Ioannis Armakollas (University of Macedonia and Hellenic Centre for European Studies) and Mr. Augustin Palokaj (Brussels correspondent, *Koha Ditore*). The programme of the three day workshop and the list of participants can be found at ELIAMEP’s website following the link: <http://www.eliamep.gr/en/security/workshop-the-role-and-impact-of-media-in-divided-societies-and-conflict-ridden-democracies-the-case-of-the-conflict-over-kosovo-9-120311/#more-4680>.

Kosovar-Albanian and Serb journalists who participated in the workshop focused on various problems which they need to tackle in their work. According to some participants, these problems include both their personal safety and the pressure put upon them by editors-in-chief and owners of media organizations. Further to this, many participants concentrated on the lack of media independence in Serbia and Kosovo

considering as necessary a change of their operation framework. They also elaborated on the problematic nature of quality journalism suggesting that important political messages can be transmitted via not only comprehensive and reliable journalistic reports but also entertainment programmes. As far as the coverage of 'sensitive issue' issues of national interests is concerned, various journalists asserted that their vision has to be future-oriented.

The following part will endeavour to summarise the main conclusions of the three-day debate in Athens on the basis of eight different units. These conclusions are based on the exchange of views among conference participants. The workshop format was based not on pre-drafted monologues in the form of conference papers but on an open and sincere dialogue among participants. Opinions are not attributed to individual participants, as points included in this report reflect the views of more than one conference participants.

Media and Prejudices

- In Belgrade and Prishtina media articles are overwhelmed with prejudices about ethnic identities and local cultures which lead to the publication of biased stories in both parts
- Reports on war crimes are particularly problematic because emotional coverage often dominates the media discourse
- Journalists find it hard to criticise the government of their own country regarding the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo
- Participants agreed that they 'do not need to be patriots' but acknowledged that traumatic memories cannot be ignored
- Knowledge of political history was considered as crucial in the attempt of journalists to report on past and current developments
- Many journalists in both Serbia and Kosovo still have a 'war mentality' which they cannot easily abandon. Within this context the 'war frame' prevails in their reporting and can hardly be replaced by balanced and reconciliatory stories

Lack of co-operation

- Co-operation between Belgrade and Prishtina media exists only at the level of informal personal contacts among journalists
- Journalists who participated in the Athens workshop believe they will now be able to start establishing further contacts in order to cross-check their news sources and expand their research interests
- Co-operation can be further fostered only if political will on both sides exists
- The language barrier constitutes an additional obstacle for the communication among journalists who do not feel comfortable with English

- A few Serb and Kosovar-Albanian Journalists who travelled to either Prishtina or Belgrade respectively have faced violent attacks by local people as for example stone-throwing and camera-braking

Media Independence

- Various media in Serbia are heavily dependent on foreign donations
- Journalists agreed that the agenda is mainly set by the governments in both Serbia and Kosovo and not by the media themselves.
- The media are highly politicized in both Serbia and Kosovo
- For various reporters who attempt to elaborate on investigative journalism personal safety issues are raised
- Institutions which encourage free media, as for example the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, were considered as particularly important

The law framework

- Journalists mentioned that the existing law framework in Serbia and Kosovo is not sufficient to protect them. A particular reference was made to Serb journalist Brankica Stankovic, who has revealed stories on football mafia, but constantly receives death threats
- Various participants mentioned that existing laws are often not implemented in Serbia and Kosovo
- An EU-model for the media in Serbia and Kosovo was considered by various participants as necessary in order to facilitate their work and to implement laws which can possibly protect them in terms of personal safety and job security

The media environment

- Media markets in both Serbia and Kosovo are relatively small. Circulation of newspapers is also low
- The main priority of media enterprises in Serbia and Kosovo is to survive market competition
- The media system operates better in Serbia than Kosovo
- The problem of access to the internet was raised by various journalists although prices of internet connection were not considered to be high
- In Kosovo employment opportunities for journalists are higher than in Serbia
- Journalists are normally trained in newsrooms and not at various schools of journalism and universities. The percentage of direct hiring from these schools and universities is low

The role of journalists

- It is hard for young journalists like the ones who participated in the Athens workshop to publish their own news stories without approval from their editors
- Most of the journalists mentioned that the problem concerning the quality of reporting is related to the editorship and/or ownership and not themselves
- What influences the work of journalists in both Serbia and Kosovo is their concern about audience reaction. Audiences are not yet prepared to read/watch/listen to evenly balanced news stories
- Journalism is mainly considered as a profession. Many journalists in both Serbia and Kosovo face serious economic difficulties and this affects their work. Within this context they often avoid to disagree with their editors in order to secure their job position in the media organization they are working

Quality in journalism

- Participants from both Serbia and Kosovo concentrated on the crisis of quality journalism
- Commercialization was seen as the most important threat and obstacle of serious news stories
- Participants discussed the lack of efficient media managers in Serbia and Kosovo and the whole Balkan region which deepens the crisis of serious journalism

Looking towards the future

- There is margin for co-operation along with talks between Belgrade and Prishtina. Journalists from both sides suggested to exchange visits in these cities especially when they need to report on sensitive issues
- Although news are normally the vehicle for transmitting significant political messages, the so-called 'infotainment' is also of increased importance. This includes reality shows and soap-operas.
- Dealing with new technologies remains an issue of concern in both Serbia and Kosovo. This is related not only to the possible impact of electronic newspapers on print ones but also on the broad usage of anonymous sources which often lead to misinformation
- A new wind of open-minded journalism can be born in Serbia and Kosovo but this will mainly depend on an extensive discussion on how to interpret the past and in particular the history of political conflict in the Balkan region
- Participants in the Athens workshop believe that prospects for high quality journalism still exist in Serbia and Kosovo and are prepared to contribute to this end

- If a future workshop is organised, invitations will have to be addressed to managing editors of media outlets as they are the main responsible ones for the decision-making process in their organizations

APPENDIX

Common Projects

- Kosovo and Serbia in their final choices: Milos Mitrovic, Arben Ahmeti
- Daily Life in Mitrovica: Rexhep Myftari, Milenko Obradovic
- Education: Boban Tralkovic, Ardian Arifaj

Kosovo and Serbia in their final choices

Kosovo has declared independence three years ago. It has been recognized by a lot of countries but not enough to move forward in becoming part of UN or EU, which are main goals proclaimed by Prishtina. Serbia considers Kosovo as it's part. The relations between them have become an obstacle in their move forward. Brussels has only one answer: dialogue

The time for frustrations seems to have past for Kosovo and Serbia. The celebrations of lately declared independence in Kosovo, or the enthusiasm in Serbia for politicians considering Kosovo as Serbia's part, are not the main concern of the public now. Kosovo and Serbia both are facing the lack of economical developments and are aiming to make a better life for their people. Both are seeing that the solution is joining EU. This is the main goal of both. Kosovo aiming to became part of EU family as an independent country. Serbia with Kosovo as it's part.

After a conflict with Serbia with a lot of crimes, an interim international administration and a long process of talks, Kosovo has declared independence. It has been recognized by a lot of countries but not enough to move forward in becoming part of UN or EU. Serbia still considers Kosovo as it's part. 22 members of EU have recognized Kosovo as a state, but five of them not. This is making EU neutral towards status. The easiest way for Brussels seems to be the agreement between parts. A technical dialogue which has started months ago, mediated by EU, for Brussels is the only way.

“The dialogue is a great opportunity for both Belgrade and Prishtina to move forward, as one of the main objectives of the dialogue is to bring both Prishtina and Belgrade closer to the EU” says Maja Kocijancic, spokesperson of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton. “Another objective of the dialogue is to promote cooperation. Talking to each other in this way is in itself an important step in the European direction. The dialogue should be a big boost for regional cooperation in the Balkans and this is something that is essential for the whole region's European perspective”, adds Maja Kocijancic.

Since the declaration of independence, Brussels has shown an unequal approach to Kosovo and Serbia, says Krenar Gashi, director of KIPRED think tank in Prishtina. “This is mainly, but not entirely, due to the fact of five members of the EU not recognizing Kosovo. The output was too many carrots and no sticks for Belgrade, and too many sticks with no carrots for Prishtina. The EU's role in the dialogue between two countries, on the other hand, is crucial. What concerns the Kosovo civil society is the fact that Brussels sees the dialogue as a process and there is no clear EU policy about it yet. This may become problematic in case Kosovo and Serbia, separately, move on forward towards integration into the EU and decide to withdraw from the table”, Gashi stated.

Apart from a lot investments from EU he believes that Kosovo is not being treated equal. "It's true about Serbia but not about Kosovo unfortunately. What is concerning is EU's too careful approach. Whilst Serbia will certainly receive candidacy status by the end of the year, due to destructive behavior of the five non-recognizing countries, Kosovo is left in a limbo. I call it a destructive behavior as not only that these countries are blocking Kosovo's progress, but by doing that they are violating international documents, such as UNSCR 1244". According to him the normalization of the relations between Belgrade and Prishtina as a condition in accession process is already set, although not formally. "Nobody in the EU countries wants another Cyprus within the EU and some constructive EU players will use all the means to ensure that Serbia acknowledges the new reality in Kosovo, which may not necessarily mean recognition of independence as such, before it makes any formal step to the European family" says Gashi.

For years Serbian public had been persuaded by its government that Serbia's attitude toward Kosovo had no relations with prior national aspiration of Serbia to become a member of European Union. Serbian sovereignty over Kosovo, which is mentioned even in The Constitution of Serbia, together with aspirations of becoming a member of EU, had been discussed as equally important priorities. Today, euro-integration is defined by the government as the task number one and stories of "two separated issues" are passé. Serbian top officials would say that Serbia had not given up both Kosovo and Europe, but only when they are explicitly asked, and not almost anytime they could, as they used to do before. Critics belonging to diverse political options disagree about the question what would be the right thing to do, but they all agree that Serbia is facing a tough choice.

Slobodan Samardžić, the vice president of oppositional Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and Minister for Kosovo and Metohija in the former Serbian government led by the Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, says that European Union forced Serbia by a system of conditioning and blackmailing to carry out the politics which suits Brussels. Samardžić's party shares the opinion of ruling Democratic Party (DS) that Kosovo should stay part of Serbia forever but thinks that DS's urging for that cause is insincere and only declarative. DSS unlike DS do not consider that it is possible for Serbia at this moment to both have good relations with EU and progress toward membership into EU on the one side while simultaneously striving toward sovereignty over Kosovo on the other.

"European Union in the current negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina expects that Serbia step by step waive its rights on Kosovo and Metohija and establish good neighborly relations with Kosovo", said Samardžić, who is also a professor on the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade where he teaches subject European Union and European relations. He believes that negotiations, which could take years, focus all attention of EU on Serbia. "I think that EU does not expect any flexibility in negotiations from Prishtina because behind Kosovo stay The United States, politics of which Brussels accepts absolutely."

Moreover, membership of Kosovo in European Union is unreal, stresses Samardžić. Not only he says that "Kosovo cannot enter EU because it fulfils none of the conditions for it" but he also believes that "EU is not seriously interested in Kosovo becoming one of its members". He bases his opinion on the evaluation that there is "chaos in legal and political issues and rule of structural criminal and corruption" on

Kosovo. Furthermore, on the question where EU sees Kosovo in the future, he answers that EU “must finish the job it accepted according, that is, to continue to supervise Kosovo”. “And EU would supervise it more easily if Serbia relinquish its rights in the Province”, adds Samardžić.

Samardžić’s party ruled in Serbia from 2000 till 2008 with short discontinuances. After Kosovo proclaimed its independence, the coalition with DS dissolved. DS still, besides the fact that the majority of the EU member states recognized Kosovo as an independent state, upholds euro-integrations of Serbia as a national priority. In September 2010 on the General Assembly of the United Nations Serbian DS’s government and EU made joint resolution on Kosovo. For Samardžić this resolution represents “the last nail which EU hammered in the coffin of Serbia” the government of which “chose the one-way road”.

Samardžić does not find it easy to say in which way Belgrade would negotiate with Pristina if DSS had been ruling party in Serbia. “It would be necessary to initiate new policy and strategy because the issue had been ruined during the last two years, since Serbian state retreated from Kosovo, reduced the budget intended for the Province and abandoned the people who live there.”

Sonja Biserko, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and member of Political Council of Liberal Democratic Party, has completely different opinion. She thinks that Serbia should recognize independence of Kosovo, because that would be useful for “both states which aim to become members of EU”. “Knowing the principles and the criteria of EU, at least that what had been presented as a priority until now, regional cooperation would make strong influence on euro-integrations of Serbia and Kosovo”, says Biserko.

Serbia is, according to her, “main obstacle on the way of Kosovo’s integration into EU, what is their mutual interest”. “With such policy Serbia loses opportunities which it would gain by becoming a member of EU. Serbia relies on Russia which obstructs acceptance of Kosovo into The United Nations.” However, Biserko believes “that even Russia will not strictly follow till the end its current policy, what can be assumed according to its intensive approach to NATO and improvement of its relations with USA”. On the question if Brussels, observed from that standpoint, would force official Belgrade into a corner and compel it to choose between firm policy that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia on the one side and membership in EU on the other, she answers positively. “After that Serbia would chose recognition and by doing that, acceptance into EU to which it naturally belongs.”

Speaking of negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina, Biserko stresses that EU insist on principles of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism as its starting points. She thinks that two sides approached negotiations sincerely, but she emphasizes that they were forced into dialog by European Commission, “which was aware that resolution of the problems between Serbia and Kosovo is prerequisite for their integration into EU”. The outcome of the recent surveys according to which support of EU membership declines in Serbia, she interprets as a disappointment which resulted from great expectations. “The elites promised variety of things to the people”, she says.

Milenko Obradovic – Rexhep Myftari

The city where ‘not even birds fly over to the other side’

Mitrovica is one of the 10 cities of the world that live divided along the ethnic line. North is mostly populated by Serbs and South by Albanians. Mitrovicans have been living their lives separately in the past 11 years since after the war of 1999 ended and left the city rigidly divided along the ethnic line. The city is also geographically divided by the river Ibar. South from river Ibar, Albanians have elected their representatives that answer the authorities in Prishtina, capital of Kosovo and in the North Serbs have elected their representatives that answer the authorities in Belgrade. Northern part of Kosovo, including municipalities: North Mitrovica, Zvecan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok is not under the jurisdiction of Kosovo’s authorities in Prishtina. Therefore, citizens of Mitrovica are living in the same city under two different local authorities and also under two other International Authorities. UN Mission to Kosovo is still functional in the North and EULEX the rule of law mission is trying to set foot in the North of Kosovo including Mitrovica. This is city is basically in a mish-mash of missions and authorities trying to help out set the differences aside and reconcile people who live there.

Unlike other areas where Serbs live, life in north-Mitrovica (further in the text, n-M) is much more difficult says Mayor of n-M Krstimir Pantic. People who live in n-M, besides the fact that they live in constant fear for their safety and their families safety, also are burdened by the lack of jobs and economic crisis, there are only a few that can find proper employment, said mayor Pantic.

Up until 1999, the main employer of the people in Mitrovica was Trepcia Mine, the industrial giant of Kosovo continues Mr.Pantic but in the year 2001 a little while after the arrival of international forces in Kosovo, production was completely stopped and ever-since, the workers receive minimal income". The main employer in n-M now is the Serbian government. Only a small number of people are lucky to work in health institutions, education, local administration and get paid by the authority of Belgrade says Mr.Pantic the rest hope that the Serbian Government will change the dire economic situation by making major investments and employ 7,000 unemployed people in n-M.

Furthermore, people of this divided city face other ridiculous problems as well, problems such as lack of water supply and power cuts. One other problem these people are faced with in their day-to-day life is the Customs. Although living in the north of Mitrovica, Kosovo Police Officials often stop the citizens and either confiscate their goods or force them to pay taxes to Kosovo government, this is

another burden people in the north have to face with says Mr.Pantic. He considers confiscating food supplies from Suhodoll residents at a checkpoint near their village is “a drastic example of human rights violation”. Their groceries and goods get confiscated if they don’t have the fiscal number and if they haven’t paid taxes to Kosovo government, continued Mr.Pantic.

Mr.Pantic mentioned a number of activities that his new management has undertaken to help the citizens live a little better after he has come to office. We have signed a contract for preparation of design and technical documentation for new water supply system. The capacity will be about 140 liters per-second, the cost of the project is estimated to be around eight million Euros. The deadline for completion is one year and with this new water system 50 thousand residents of n-M, Zvecan and Zubin Potok will be supplied regularly without shortages.

We also promised to solve the problem of housing and we have already issued a tender for construction of residential buildings in the village Suhodoll and in the neighborhood called Bosniak Mahala. The Sports center will be completed in October this year, there will be enough room for about 1,200 visitors and it will be built in an area where a military compound use to be said Mayor Pantic. One thing that everyone, young and old, employed and unemployed, those who lived here before and those who came after the war, one thing everyone agrees on is that life is not easy here and no one knows what the future will be like for them.

How difficult life can be is best told by Milena Arsic now 35 years old. She ran away from Croatia when the war broke out there and lived as a refugee in Eastern Kosovo and just about when she was getting used to the people and life in a new environment another war broke out and she had to run away again, explains Ms.Arsic. Many years have gone by and I still don’t have a steady job nor a place to live, the worst of all is that I still haven’t found a soul mate because of constantly having to move from one place to another says Ms.Arsic.

Near by the bridge that divides the city in two, an old man, Pensioner named Milos Radovanovic, walks by the fountain and as a rule of thumb, checks every day the board where people mount announcements of those who died day’s before. Although he’s from Mitrovica originally, he says he doesn’t know half of the people who live in n-M nowadays. People came here from all around Kosovo he says, they fled from the war and now live a difficult life here. When asked, how is life like in n-M Mr.Radovanovic says he remembers better day’s and although “life is not easy and not as it should be, I have no where else to go” continues Mr.Radovanovic. He lived all his life in n-M, this is where his children and grand children grew up, he remembers when n-M was a metropolitan city of cink and lead and a city of metallurgists and people who worked in Trepca Mine, now in his seventies he gets nostalgic about the city and how it once life use to be better here.

Another citizen who used to live in the south Ms.Stana Pavlovic, recalls the good old day’s when she went to the market every Saturday where buyers and those who sell goods use to meet. She remembers good old day’s when she used to go to work every day but ever since after the war everything changed for her, she say’s “not even the

birds fly over the bridge, they share with us the good and bad, South of Mitrovica for us is unsafe territory, full of surprises and challenges continues Ms.Pavlovic"

North Mitrovica is also a university city, in a nice spring day streets are full of people, young parents walking their children in the gardens, cafes and restaurants full of youth. Many came to this city to study, there are those that came from Montenegro, like Radica Scekic from Berane. He remembers coming to n-M and feeling strange about everything but he feels much better after having been part of the city and has also gone through times when demonstrations and protests were organized and went through tear gas and rubber bullets police threw at them. Many others come to n-M from Serbia and Montenegro to get an academic degree says Mr.Scekic.

Although many people from the north don't interact with their fellow citizens from the south of the city, there are those, and especially business people who meet with Albanians on day-to-day basis. Often threatened by his own group of people, a Serb business owner who chooses to remain anonymous in this article, says that he is tired of politics and he will no longer be pushed back by the threats and that he is willing to cooperate with Albanians in the South. He has started to think as a business man, he can sell his products faster and for a better price if he were to cooperate with Albanians, he is "sick and tired of the politics" he says all he needs is, peace and acceptance by his Albanian counterparts and he will do fine.

There are many business owners from the North who cooperate with their counterparts in the South and although many think that Mitrovica is a hopeless case, there are many of those who still believe that in a long run, people will still start to communicate with each other, do business with each other and live side by side with one another in peace. Residents of the northern part of Mitrovica lack sports facilities, cultural centers and most elementary and high schools are in the south where they have no access to. In spite the fact that it is not easy to organize life in a cramped space and it is difficult to get work, also where the roads are damaged and water and electricity shortages are quite often, and the freedom of movement is not as it should be, people still cherish Mitrovica as their own and do not want to leave, they say, Homeland is Beautiful.

Boban Trajkovic, Ardian Arifaj

Welcome to the Museum

National Museum of Kosovo is located in the old part of Prishtina, in a beautiful building built in 1896, in the time of the Ottoman Empire and under the influence of the Austrian architects. Entering the museum you are welcomed by the small figurine of a woman whose picture tourists must have already seen all around Prishtina. It is the Goddess on the Throne, Neolithic terracotta depicted in the city's emblem. Kemalj Luci, archaeologist and curator in the Museum of Kosovo, says that the figurine belongs to the Vinca culture, a Neolithic archaeological culture that covered most of the territory of the central Balkans peninsula.

“The Goddess was found in 1952, in the vicinity of Prishtina, in the archaeological site of Predionica. It was called the Goddess in the Throne and it dates from 3.500 BC. First it was the symbol of the Museum and now it is the symbol of Prishtina since it shows the uninterrupted life that flourished in this space,” says Luci.

Most of the artefacts in the museum are archaeological artefacts found around Kosovo and are thousands of years old. Luci says that the Museum misses a lot of valuable collections and that the most valued artefacts are actually in Belgrade. In the main hall of the Museum, a large tablet hanging in the wall informs the visitors that more than 1200 artefacts have been taken from the museum.

“Just before the war in Kosovo started, in 1999, ethnographic and archaeological riches of the National Museum were exhibited in Belgrade. The war started and the objects have remained there”, explains Kemalj Luci.

On the other hand, Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade recently held an exhibition of the Serb folk dresses from Kosovo. Visitors can see artistic and artisan skills of anonymous authors, mainly women, from XIX century. The main characteristics of the wardrobe are the lively colours. Wedding dresses from Metohija, the western part of Kosovo, are dominated by the black colour, while the same dresses from Pomoravlje region, eastern Kosovo, are usually dominated by the colour of red.

“Rich colours at that time had symbolic, that is magical, importance, and were supposed to provide long and healthy life,” explains Mina Darmanovic, curator of the Museum.

Exhibited clothes are also special because they are actually part of the ethnographic collections that once adored the walls in Prishtina and whose return is requested by the Kosovo side. Branimir Jokic is director of the institution that calls itself Museum in Prishtina and which is actually located in Belgrade. The Director of the relocated museum says that the exhibition aims to highlight the threats to Serb cultural heritage in Kosovo.

“In the last decade, around 150 monasteries, churches and holy sites have been destroyed or damaged in Kosovo and Metohija. Some are being rebuild but in small numbers. I am sure that there are monuments dating from XIII and XIV century

whose traces you cannot find and no signs that there were once mediaeval monasteries and churches,” says Jokic.

The exhibition in Belgrade has reignited the calls from Prishtina for the return of the museum artefacts. For more than a decade the Kosovo side demands that the artefacts are returned, while Belgrade categorically refuses to do so. Importance of this issue for the Kosovo Albanians is illustrated by the fact that the opposition parties have requested that, among others, return of all artefacts is made a precondition for the beginning of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia under the auspices of EU.

Agim Gerguri, Director of the Kosovo Institute for Protection of Historical Monuments in Prishtina says that except the ethnographic collection, Belgrade also hold 600 archaeological artefacts dating from the VII millennia BC to the early mediaeval period.

“These objects must be returned because they belong here, because they were found in this territory. These are objects that witness the cultures that were developed in Kosovo and must be returned where they originated”, says he.

On the other hand, Branimir Jokic of the relocated museum claims that they legally protect parts of their collection. Jokic was director of the Museum in Prishtina until 1999, which was relocated from Prishtina to Belgrade after the 1999 war. Together with the artefacts, Serb experts from Pristina also moved to Belgrade.

“Museum artefacts that are in our possession are documented, filmed and protected and we are always ready to provide them for viewing to whomever is interested and who approaches us with the good intention and good will to enter the problem of cultural identities in Kosovo and Metohija,” says Branimir Jokic.

The story is more complicated though and it is not only about technical return of the objects. This is confirmed both in Belgrade and in Prishtina. The Serbian side, as an argument why the artefacts must remain in Belgrade, cites protection of the Serbian cultural identity which, as they claim, is threatened in Kosovo. Jokic says that Albanian institutions and experts in Kosovo use wording such as “Kosovo culture” and “Kosovo history of art” that threaten the Serb identity.

“This is promoted as creation of a new nation and new cultural identity – Kosovo cultural identity. As you can see when travelling in Kosovo and Metohija all place-names have been changed, names of towns have been changed, and one gets the impression as if the Serbs have never lived in Kosovo.” Branimir Jokic fears that, among others, objects that witness existence and creativity of Serbs in Kosovo might become Kosovo and not Serb heritage. “Serbian circles of experts do not deny their part of cultural identity, but why would we give up our cultural identity and break the thousand year old line of the Serb cultural development in Kosovo and Metohija, giving somebody else the right to take care of our cultural heritage,” says Jokic.

Regarding the presentation of the cultural heritage in Kosovo, historian and author of a number of history textbooks, Frasher Demaj, says that “Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Bosnians and other communities live in Kosovo. They are all citizens of Kosovo. As an Albanian I don’t like it when I am called a Kosovar, but I am citizen of Kosovo and in that context I accept being called a Kosovar. I think that all cultural heritages that exist in Kosovo belong to people who live in Kosovo.”

Demaj says that the Serbian side is politicizing the whole issue since it does not recognize the state of Kosovo. Moreover, for decades it has negated the role of the Albanians in the history of Kosovo. "If we follow the thinking pattern of the Belgrade, than Turkey as a state would be the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire and consequently owner of all mosques that are in the territory of Serbia, Kosovo and further. I believe that the cultural heritage belongs to people who live in the territory where that culture is based."

Agim Gerguri from the Kosovo Institute for Protection of Historical Monuments shares the same opinion.

"Serb side insists on presenting us as someone who destroys monuments of history. In reality, we want to preserve our monuments, be it Serb or Albanian. If we want to have a state, than we must protect them and place them in museums." Until now, one artefact has returned in Prishtina, the Goddess in the Throne, which was returned from Belgrade in 2002 with mediation of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. Return of other artefacts is not a topic in the dialogue between delegations from Kosovo and Serbia that is taking place in Brussels. Yet, protection of the Serb Cultural Heritage in Kosovo is an important topic for which both, Serb and Albanian side have a lot to talk about.