

## The Balkans-Caucasus tangle: states and citizens

By Mary Kaldor,  
Created 2008-01-09 13:51

The many victims of the war on terror have included multilateralism. So damaging are the effects that 2008 could see an unravelling even of the achievements of the multilateral approach of the 1990s in the [Balkans](#) [1], the [Caucasus](#) [2] and elsewhere. To avert this fate, in a period when the United States will increasingly be consumed by the presidential election race, the European Union in particular will be challenged to adopt a clearer and sharper sense of responsibility in potential conflict-zones.

Most immediately, there is a probability that Kosovo will early in 2008 declare independence - albeit in the slightly qualified form that follows the [Martti Ahtisaari plan](#) [4] delivered to the United Nations in March 2007, with its call for "supervised independence" and a continuing international presence. But in any case, the declaration is likely to be followed by a spate of similar acts in other territories - the northern Serb part of Kosovo, Herzeg-Bosne (the Croatian mini-state in Bosnia-Herzegovina) or Republika Srpska (the Serbian entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina). The "frozen conflicts" in the south Caucasus are likely to see [similar](#) [4] shifts, with possible independence moves - with encouragement from Russia - by [Abkhazia](#) [4], South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. So the formal break-up both of Bosnia-Herzegovina and of Georgia are possible in 2008.

### The seeds of violence

The challenge of Kosovo will be a test-case for the European Union. Until now, the EU's efforts in eastern Europe and the Balkans have been relatively successful in avoiding the kind of instability that characterises large parts of Africa and the middle east or that is likely to follow the death of Benazir Bhutto in [Pakistan](#) [4]. With the reform treaty now in place and plans for a new security strategy underway, the EU needs to take a lead in managing the process of serial declarations of independence.

There is a real risk of spreading [destabilisation](#) [5] in the Balkans and the Caucasus. The criminal/nationalist entrepreneurs who profited from the wars in the 1990s were never properly dealt with. On the contrary, they have been nurtured by the combination of nationalist governments, high unemployment and lawlessness. Governments in the region - in [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#) [5], Serbia, Macedonia, Albania or

Mary Kaldor is professor of [global governance](#) [3] at the London School of Economics (LSE), and convenor of the human-security study group that reports to the European Union's foreign-policy chief Javier Solana

Among Mary Kaldor's many articles in **openDemocracy**:

["Iraq: a war like no other](#) [3]" (27 March 2003)

["Iraq: the democratic option](#) [3]" (13 November 2003)

["Safe democracy](#) [3]" (23 December 2004)

["Parallel politics in Iraq](#) [3]" (22 March 2005) - with Yahia Said

["Iraq: the wrong war](#) [3]" (8 June 2005)

["London lives](#) [3]" (7 July 2005)

Georgia, for example - are not simply (as the jargon has it) "weak states"; their weakness is sustained by what some have described as shadow networks of transnational crime and extremist ideologies. There has been an expansion of human-trafficking, money-laundering, and the smuggling of cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and weapons over the last decade - much of it to satisfy European and American markets - and all in the face of international agreements, aid programmes and the presence of foreign troops and agencies.

These problems are the outward manifestation of unresolved economic, social and institutional problems which the international community - whose policy toward these regions has been dominated by a top-down approach designed above all to maintain stability [6] - has failed to address. Political efforts have been focused on status [7]; military efforts have given priority to separating forces and controlling heavy weapons; economic efforts have concentrated on economic growth, macroeconomic stability and control of inflation.

Meanwhile the entrepreneurs of violence have fed on the spread of grassroots populist nationalism and/or religious radicalisation that has exploited the frustrations arising from high levels of unemployment, high crime rates and human-rights violations, the trauma of past violence, and the weakness of civil society. For example, the Kosovo Liberation Army leader Hashim Thaci won the Kosovar elections [8] of 17 November 2007, and (while the main current Serbian politicians are nationalist enough) there is a risk that the more extreme radical nationalist Tomislav Nikolic [9] will do well in the Serbian presidential elections scheduled for 20 January 2008 [10].

Violence will further strengthen the position of these "spoilers". The Ahtisaari plan for Kosovo envisages "decentralisation", which means in current conditions a kind of internal partition between Serb and Albanian municipalities. A new bout of ethnic cleansing will lead to the expulsion [11] of Serbs from the southern part of Kosovo and of the few remaining Albanians in the north. Militant groups with names like the Albanian National Army or the Prince Lazar Army (named after the Serbian leader killed in the myth-encrusted [12] battle of Kosovo in 1389) are already mobilising [13]. The violence could spread to areas where there are neighbouring Albanian minorities, such as Macedonia and southern Serbia, as well as to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The tension will be worsened if, as is expected, a Serbian blockade of Kosovo is imposed; this would in particular stop electricity supplies. It is possible to outline similar scenarios in the south Caucasus.

### A test for Europe

How will the international community respond to these developments? At the moment, as usual, the discussion is about status. The US will support the independence of Kosovo. The EU will be divided and Russia will oppose this outcome. Yet the

"America's Iraq plight: old and new thinking [3]" (13 February 2007)

"How to free hostages [3]" (29 September 2004)

"Palestine's human insecurity: a Gaza report [3]" (20 May 2007) - with Mient Jan Faber

Among **openDemocracy's** articles on Kosovo and the future of the Balkans:

TK Vogel, "Kosovo: a break in the ice [7]" (2 February 2007)

Marko Attila Hoare, "Kosovo: the Balkans' last independent state [7]" (12 February 2007)

Vicken Cheterian, "Serbia after Kosovo [7]" (18 April 2007)

Eric Gordy, "Serbia's Kosovo claim: much ado about... [7]" (2 October 2007)

Paul Hockenos, "Kosovo's contested future [7]" (16 November 2007)

Juan Garrigues, "Kosovo's troubled victory [7]" (7 December 2007)

real issue is how to protect ordinary people from the effects of these high-level [14] manoeuvres. Nato forces are now trying to protect the borders of Kosovo instead of focusing on protecting both Serbs and Albanian at risk of ethnic cleansing and trying to maintain public security.

The EU is planning to send a rule-of-law mission, which is much needed. But who will provide alternative sources [15] of electricity and jobs for Albanians and alternative sources of income for Serbs who are currently dependent on Belgrade and have no option than to obey Belgrade's dictates even if they might prefer to stay in Kosovo and live with their erstwhile neighbours? Above all, who is talking to ordinary people - among them Serbs, Albanians, Croats, Georgians, Abkhazians, and Ossetians - all of whom long for peace and work, but whose voices and concerns are often appropriated by extremists?

Can the European Union respond to these challenges? Will it remain stuck in arguments for and against changes of status, or will it prove to have the resources and political will to protect people and communities?

---

**Source URL:**

[http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy\\_power/balkans\\_caucasus\\_tangle](http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy_power/balkans_caucasus_tangle)

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=275>

[2] [http://iwpr.net/index.php?apc\\_state=henpcrs&s=o&o=caucasus\\_map.html](http://iwpr.net/index.php?apc_state=henpcrs&s=o&o=caucasus_map.html)

[3] <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/>

[4] <http://www.unosek.org/unosek/index.html>

[5] <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/analysis/7094/>

[6] <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/7254/>

[7] [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/in\\_focus.php?id=91](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/in_focus.php?id=91)

[8] <http://www.cafebabel.com/en/article.asp?T=A&id=2898>

[9] [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=08&nav\\_id=46782](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=08&nav_id=46782)

[10] [http://www.angus-reid.com/tracker/view/28973/serbia\\_presidential\\_2008](http://www.angus-reid.com/tracker/view/28973/serbia_presidential_2008)

[11] [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=09&nav\\_id=46787](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=09&nav_id=46787)

[12] <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/8454.html>

[13] <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/7171/>

[14] <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5201&l=1>

[15] <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/>

0,,contentMDK:21089102%7EmenuPK:2246556%7EpagePK:2865106%7EpiPK:2865128%7EtheSitePK



This article is published by Mary Kaldor, , and openDemocracy.net under a Creative Commons licence. You may republish it free of charge with attribution for non-commercial purposes following these guidelines. If you teach at a university we ask that your department make a donation. Commercial media must contact us for permission and fees. Some articles on this site are published under different terms.