

EDI RAMA

Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania

Thierry de MONTBRIAL

Monsieur, le Premier Ministre. He speaks French, like me, or even better.

Edi RAMA

Thank you for this very kind invitation, and I very much appreciate being here with Ana, whom I respect a lot, and even admire for her courage and her leadership. Let me tell you that, three years ago, this would have been impossible. Absolutely impossible. Three years ago, we were still living totally apart – not only between us, but also in the broader sense of the region. We never sat together to talk about our problems, to talk about the future, and so on and so forth. Then, I decided to visit Belgrade 68 years after the last official visit, which was not an easy thing to do, and in a very tense atmosphere, but it opened the path. Then, the then Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, came to Tirana – the first official visit ever between the two neighbours. In parallel, we also started the so-called Berlin Process, through which, for the first time in history, we found ourselves all together around a table in Berlin, invited by the Chancellor, to talk about regional cooperation. Not to talk about borders and conflicts and what has separated us for many decades.

It was not easy, and as a matter of fact, there is nothing historical in meeting today, which is great, because when we would meet in Belgrade or Tirana or Berlin, it was historical pictures. Now, it is not historical. It is boring to the point that journalists would not even run to come and see us meeting, so this is the great side of it. Of course, we have a fundamental disagreement, as Ana said, on Kosovo, but again, even in this aspect, there is a lot of improvement, because there is a continuing dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. People sit together, people talk. Although they are practically in a fundamental disagreement with each other, it does not impede being around one table and talking about not only this, but also many other things. What I would see as a very positive reflection of it is how much things are changing on the level of the population.

People are no longer so frustrated and so reluctant to meet with each other, to come and go, to build business projects, to have cultural projects and so on, so it is a new way to live in the Balkans, which is fundamentally in discontinuity with our culture of living in the past. I remember one thing – and I do not want, I hope, because he also was a great friend, another Prime Minister of Serbia – some years ago, we were in a meeting like this, and also the Prime Minister of Kosovo was invited, and we were in the lobby having some coffee, and when we had to walk out, they just had to pass in the doorway, so it was impossible to not see each other. It was a handshake that happened, and then, I do not know how many times the guy tried to tell how many journalists that this was completely coincidental, that he did not like it, but he had to get past. This was not a long time ago, I am talking about seven or eight years ago, so this is a completely new time.

We have agreed to disagree on one fundamental issue, but we have also agreed to work and build upon, and at the same time, try to find the way to make people live in a much more relaxed and much less tense atmosphere with each other.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL

Well, thank you very much. There is a very renowned French historian who, after the fall of the Soviet external empire, and then the Soviet Union itself, said, 'well that is good news for historians, because it shows that here is still a future for that profession, but there is also bad news, and the bad news is that they will have to work again on the history of the Balkans', so I assume that the disagreement on Kosovo is, to a large extent, based on historical considerations.