

## PANELISTS DEBATE

### **Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

You said that you have agreed to disagree on Kosovo. Can you be more specific on the exact nature of the disagreement as of today?

### **Edi RAMA**

You have devoted the audience to have a fight here, but I am...

### **Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

No, no, no I will interpose myself.

### **Edi RAMA**

...I am very afraid you will not succeed. No, it is – I will go forward one step, and then she will follow. No, it is – the history is known, and nowadays, Kosovo is a republic that is recognised by many countries, and of course, the United States and many of the European countries, France and others have recognised it. At the same time, there are other countries that have not, but it is a reality. It is there, it is working like an independent sovereign state with its own institutions, and I am very happy to say, with a very admirable model of respect for minorities – first and foremost, the Serbian minority who is represented in parliament and in government. So my conviction has always been and still is that by recognising Kosovo, Serbia will make a major step forward, and will practically overcome the burden of the past, which is an impediment to look to the future with less of this burden.

Of course, this is our side, this is my side, but at the same time, I have to recognise, before Ana takes the floor, that there is an effort, which is considerable, on the Serbian side, by the President, first and foremost, to open a dialogue within the country about going forward in this process, and to somehow consider that in this process, there is a need not to persist with the position saying 'this is it, there is nothing to do, we want all of it'. This is what he is trying to do a little, and I respect it very much. It is painful, it is not easy. Tradition is not helpful in that regard, but the sooner the better, the solution would I think, fundamentally relax everything and everyone. The last point I would like to make is that now, our major challenge and problem is not with each other, it is with the EU. We happened to be in a situation where, when the EU was in very good shape, and was ready, we were the bad guys. Now we are the good guys, but the EU is no longer in good shape, so I do not know where and when we will find each other in a situation to both be ready to embrace, because it is going like, we want to marry you, but we do not want to negotiate with you, we do not want to talk with you, because there are some problems. So we are candidates to marry, but we are not talking, so I hope this will come soon.

### **Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

Well of course, not all European countries recognise Kosovo. In particular Spain, if I am not mistaken, for reasons that everybody will better understand today, but before I give the floor to Madam Prime Minister, frankly speaking, do you think that so far, the history of independent Kosovo is a success story?

### **Edi RAMA**

What do you mean by that?

### **Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

Well, in all aspects, you know, security, trafficking of all kinds, instability...

**Edi RAMA**

No, I think, first of all, it is a new state, so – let me tell you very frankly – it has become a very easy trend to connect corruption and crime and trafficking and all this with the Balkans, and it is very easy also for everyone that wants to avoid headaches about enlargement, avoid headaches about getting more countries to the table, to just jump on that. I want to say one thing, and then I will stop. I saw a report of the European Commission on corruption within the EU: the numbers are bigger than the GDP of all our countries. So – now, I accept to be criticised on that, because the nature of corruption in our countries is different, in the sense that it has a lot to do with institutions; they need to be stronger and with modernisation, with the state as a modern entity, which we do not have yet in the way that France or Germany or others have, because it has been worked out a long time ago to have what we have now, which was not the case then, but I would like to state that yes, we have problems with crime. We have problems with corruption. We have problems with all, but none of the Balkans, neither Albania nor Kosovo, are the fatherland of crime and corruption, so if we will then try to find the fatherland, I do not know if it is one, but it is not in the Balkans. It is not in Albania, it is not in Kosovo.

**Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

Thank you very much. Madam Prime Minister. I have visited myself Serbia and Kosovo, I have been there, including the *Champ des Merles*. I do not know what it is called in English...

**Edi RAMA**

You said I speak French better than you, so...

**Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

It is supposed to be the cradle of Serbia; it is the battle which is considered to be the source, the origin of Serbia. Is this separation still considered as a terrible wound? Is the Kosovo issue still as sensitive as it was, I would say, 10 years ago? My impression is that it has softened a bit, but maybe I am wrong.

**Ana BRNABIĆ**

I think it is still very, very sensitive and it will – I think it will always be a very, very emotional issue for Serbia. I mean, the centre of our church, of the Serbian Orthodox Church has been in Kosovo, it has been in medieval times, you know, the capital has been in Kosovo, and all of these places still carry the same names, so whenever you look at the map, it – you know, that reminds you of the cradle of Serbia. It is a very, very emotional issue. We are trying to be flexible, and you know, we are trying not to look at it from the emotional point of view, because we all know where the emotions took us in the past, so we are trying to be very pragmatic, but as of the status of Kosovo for us, I have to admit, it is a very, very straightforward issue. It is a very straightforward issue. It is a matter of international law, and the international law with that is very clear. We have always kept saying that if you recognise the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo, you will open Pandora's box, and that is exactly what is happening today, and you know, we are – Spain is our great friend, and we are keeping calm and quiet in order not to really blow the situation with Spain and Catalonia out of proportion, but that is what happens when you basically do not respect international law, and blur the boundaries, and Serbia has been very clear about that. We had then Crimea, we are recognising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, although we have a very close and very good relationship with Russia, because it is in line with the international law, so you know, we are getting into a very difficult, very, very complex place when you are not recognising international law, and that is what we have kept saying, and that is what is basically becoming more and more apparent, and I think unfortunately, that Europe has finally come out of a very difficult period after Brexit, with all of the important elections in Germany, in France, in Austria, in the Netherlands, you know, and came out with a stronger Europe, but then this thing in Spain happened.

We again say, you know, go back to the international law, and by respecting the international law, we will all be in a more stable, more secure place, so that is basically what we have kept saying, but what is also important is that we have what we have today, and again, also the Serbs in Kosovo have proved to be very responsible politicians, and

they basically joined the current government in Pristina, because first and foremost, we have to think about the quality of life, the security and the safety of all people living there. So maintaining that, I do not think Serbia can ever recognise the independence of Kosovo, because again, we think that would further open Pandora's box. We are deeply committed to right now thinking about the quality of life of all the people in Kosovo.

### **Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

Well I think that many outside analysts agree, that from the international law viewpoint, there is a real issue, but we are not going to talk about that here. I suggest that we switch to the European Union, and the aspiration that both countries, Serbia and Albania have to join the European Union at some stage. Now, the question is, will these problems, the Kosovo problem, will it be dissolved in the European Union, if the European Union enlarges, failed to include – to integrate – both the countries, or it will be the reverse? That is, the beginning of more disintegration of the European Union? That is a very serious issue, because after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we have had to enlarge very, very quickly, and that is one major reason for the current difficulties of the European Union. We have been, in a way, forced to enlarge too fast, and today, there is a degree of heterogeneity within the European Union, and governance issues, which are quite difficult to overcome, and in fact, Prime Minister Rama alluded to that a few minutes ago. You said that Serbia will never recognise Kosovo. Of course, this 'never' depends on further historical developments, including the European Union, so can we now ask both of you how you see your own future with the European Union? What should we do, the European Union, today, and how could we have a process that gradually, over time, would allow to smoothly remove the problem?

### **Edi RAMA**

First of all, I would say that it is a different historical moment, and comparing the fast enlargement of the beginning with the need to complete the process is not very accurate, I would say. It is not about enlargement in this case, it is about completion, because of many reasons, but I would try to concentrate them. First and foremost, there is a strategic need for Europe to complete, and not to let the Balkans remain a grey zone, where other actors can have their hands, and can promote their agendas, and create disruption.

Secondly, we live in a time where, as the very distinguished friend of this World Policy Conference, the Patriarch, reminded us, it is also very much connected with how different religions live together, and how different communities with different faiths succeed to not disrupt, and let us not forget that the Balkans are the most diverse area in Europe in terms of religion. The Muslims in the Balkans are the most – let us say – pro-European Muslims you can find in the Muslim world, and the Muslims are the most pro-American, so our Muslims are more pro-American than Texans, but it is not something that may stay there forever, and it is not to be taken for granted, because others are also trying to – so radicalism and disruption in different ways can come. Then it will be as it has always been, not just the Balkan problem, but the European problem. It would be a problem for Europe.

Thirdly, it is also very important to complete the project exactly for the same reason that anti-European, or anti-enlargement or whatever, are trying to say. Exactly for a more safe and secure Europe, for a more safe and secure France, or Germany or whatever, the Balkans need to be part of this project. Otherwise, they risk being platforms for different disruptions, so this is strategic. On the other hand, I understand, and we understand, that having all the headaches, and all the problems that Europe is facing with newcomers, it is not very sexy to imagine extending the table with Serbs and Albanian and Macedonians and others that will come, and make the family go beyond 30 members, and imagine handling Albanians or Serbs vetoing something – I know, it is not – you know, but at the same time, it is exactly the reason why Europe has to reform, and has to change. We fully understand. I fully agree. I am fully sympathetic with what President Macron is trying to promote, as a different way of making the Union work. Let us face it, it cannot be like the grandfather and the grandmother – you know who they might be in the European Union context – and then the parents, and then the children have the same vote, and then you have a kid there, saying 'no, I veto you', so no budget for the family. I understand it, we understand it, but at the same time, what I cannot understand is the non-negotiation between the European Union and Albania yet, or Macedonia, or the other countries that are not negotiating. Serbia is negotiating, and Montenegro is negotiating, but we are in a EU candidate country, so we are candidates to marry. We are told that we will marry, and we are being told that we will not talk. So how will this happen? Negotiating is not enlarging, so it is not of any obligation. They can say, 'okay, we are negotiating, you

are not ready, so you have to do this and that and that, and then I will see again', but not talking is completely understandable, so this is our picture.

**Thierry de MONTBRIAL**

Madam?

**Ana BRNABIĆ**

Firstly, I completely agree with Edi. I think that South-East Europe, or as we now usually refer to it, Western Balkans, need the EU. At the same time, I think that the EU needs the Western Balkans, I think probably equally, because of safety and security, and because it will make Europe whole, so Serbia has started negotiations. We have now opened 10 chapters out of 35. We hope to have three to five more opened by the end of the year, but we fully support that the EU starts negotiations with Albania as soon as possible, because I think it is important for the region. It is a good signal, it is a good signal for all the citizens of the Western Balkans, which are trying to reform the societies, first and foremost in order to economically progress and do better, but also in terms of social reforms, more efficient judiciary, rule of law, and so on and so forth. I think it is very, very important that the negotiations also start, especially with Albania.

We will obviously try to proceed in this EU accession process as soon as possible, but to again go back to what is really important, and that is not really the pace at which we are opening and closing these chapters. It is basically the pace at which we are actually implementing the reforms, and at which we are actually having macroeconomic stability, fiscal stability and fiscal discipline. We have an efficient and transparent public administration that is citizen-focused. We have the rule of law in terms of efficient judiciary. All of that is important first and foremost for us, and our citizens and our businesses, and then consequently also leads us to the EU, so I think we should change because of ourselves, but again, to reiterate, I think the region needs Europe, but Europe also needs the region, and I think that is basically how we should talk about all of that.

I think what will lead this is regional stability, which is why I think the Berlin Process is extremely important, and what will lead the regional stability is going to be economy and business, and basically this regional economic area that we are now working on, and again to go back to the relationship within Kosovo and Serbia and Europe and Albania, is that with all of the political difficulties, actually the Serbian Chamber of Commerce was the one who actually helped the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce join the European International Chamber of Commerce, and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce is also – our President is a very good friend of Mr Rama – is often in Albania, and you know, I think, the economic relationship, and cooperation is certainly something that will lead the way. I think there, the politicians and the politics should follow.