

Letters Editor  
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**Please consider this letter for publication on Friday 24 March, the anniversary of the start of NATO's bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.**

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Dear Editor

A year after the NATO bombing began, Kosovo is plunging into ethnically divided chaos, from which a Bosnian style partition appears – to many – to be the only option, despite the international community's earlier commitments to restore a multi-ethnic society. Salaries are high for young western staff, but there is no clear chain of command or even a proper communications system in place.

This growing crisis is compounded by the weakness of the strategy for dealing with Milosevic. Increasingly it is becoming clear that any regime which is ruthless, criminalised and intolerant of dissent from within its domestic population will be indifferent to sanctions and diplomatic isolation. The Serbian government's current demonisation of and clampdown on the independent media is both the regime's response and an obvious warning to reformers in the Federal Republic.

If the international community is ever to extricate itself from the Balkans, a coherent strategy for democratising the countries of the region must be developed, and an effective managerial structure created to carry out the programme. At present both are conspicuous by their absence, with "politicisation" of the structures and appointments to international institutions a major problem.

There needs to be a much greater willingness to support, diplomatically and financially, those who seek to create democratic space on the ground. At present, this is urgent to prevent the demise of the independent media in Serbia. It means ensuring the free flow of information and ideas across all boundaries. It may even mean overhauling the current sanctions policy so it either hits the regime and spares the people or is abandoned.

If a more systematic and professional approach to building democratic institutions is not taken, the international community risks becoming a permanent yet ineffectual occupying power in the Balkans, presiding over demoralised communities and institutionalised crime.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Puddephatt  
Executive Director