

## Kosovo Embassy: Seminar on Independence

On 7 April 2009, Helms School of Government faculty members and students participated in a seminar on Kosovo's progress since achieving independence. This session, organized by Dr. Stephen Bowers, took place in the Kosovo Embassy in Washington.



The picture on the left shows some of the seminar participants. We were joined in this program by Agri Verrija, assistant to Albanian Ambassador Aleksander Salabanda, who provided an Albanian perspective on some of the issues discussed during the seminar. Because the Kosovo Embassy staff has only recently been posted to Washington, this was Dr. Verrija's first meeting with them.



(Left) Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Avni Spahiu, hosted the seminar and made the main presentation regarding the development of Kosovo as an independent state. Mr. Spahiu is scheduled to become Kosovo's first Ambassador to the United States. He began his professional career in journalism and served as director of Kosovo's public television broadcast network.

In his presentation, Mr. Spahiu briefly charted Kosovo's national development as part of the Roman, Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Ottoman empires. The Kosovo Assembly's declaration of independence in 2008 represented the final step in the nation's long evolution.

# The Development of Constitutional Government

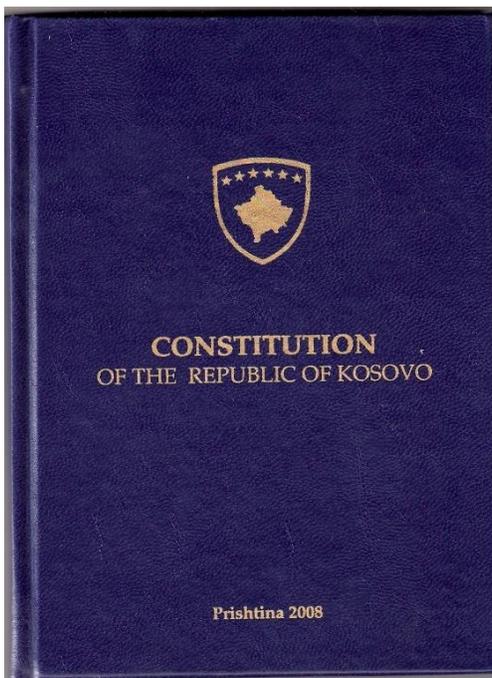


First Secretary Jetish Jashari

An important theme developed during the discussions in the Embassy was the steps in creating a constitutional framework for the Kosovo Republic. In preparation for his role in the seminar, Helms School student Joseph Goins examined the Kosovo constitution and raised several questions for discussion.

The discussions of Kosovo's constitution were led by First Secretary Jetish Jashari and First Secretary Arta Rama. Mr. Jashari and Ms. Rama are lawyers who were members of the working group responsible for writing Kosovo's constitution. They explained that in their preparation of the constitution they drew

on the increasingly vast array of experiences of other post-communist nations as well as the most democratic countries. Consequently they drafted a document that takes into account the experiences – both positive and negative – of other multi-ethnic communities emerging from the communist party states in order to create an environment that insures equal human rights for all its citizens.



First Secretary Arta Rama

## The Pursuit of International Recognition

Mr. Spahiu explained that one of the goals of the newly independent Kosovo is to create a system based on tolerance and the acceptance of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Only through these principals, he maintained, can Kosovo overcome the painful legacies of the communist period and the years of violence that decimated so many of its communities regardless of their ethnic heritages.



Joseph Goins with Mr. Spahiu

An additional goal is enhancing Kosovo's diplomatic standing by securing diplomatic recognition within the international community. When he opened the seminar, Mr. Spahiu noted that fifty-six nations had recognized Kosovo's independence. As he emphasized the steps being taken as part of this effort, First Secretary Rama interrupted him with a phone call in which he was informed that a 57<sup>th</sup> nation, Gambia, had extended diplomatic recognition. Their greatest success in the struggle for recognition had been in Western Europe and North America with the United



Dr. Bowers & Mr. Avni Spahiu

States leading the way. By contrast, although Saudi Arabia is becoming the 58<sup>th</sup> nation to extend recognition, Kosovo has enjoyed less success in the Middle East, presumably because those nations, already smarting from American success in Iraq, reject Kosovo as a "US creation". Nations which are closer to Russia also reject diplomatic ties with Kosovo, according to Mr. Spahiu.

An equally important objective of Kosovo's policies is to insure a tolerant environment that will foster positive relations between the nation's Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish communities. Constitutional provisions as well as educational policy advance this objective. Under current practice, Kosovar parents may choose to have their children educated in either an Albanian or in a Serbian

school. Although the Albanians are the overwhelming majority, Serbs do not suffer from discrimination under the legal system or within the educational community. Furthermore, as Embassy representatives noted, Kosovo's Islamic community is well-known for its moderate, tolerant tone and its cordial relations with the nation's Christian congregations.

As part of the CSS work on Albanian affairs, Melissa Allen (*pictured on the right with Charge d'Affaires Spahiu*) is responsible for the development of short studies on the Albanian communities of southeastern Europe. In pursuit of this objective, she used the seminar as an opportunity of establishing connections needed to advance her research. Mr. Spahiu and other members of the Embassy staff agreed to support this work.



Melissa Allen & Mr. Spahiu

An additional conclusion of the seminar was that the Kosovo Embassy and representatives of the Helms School should maintain contacts and establish relationships that will insure future contacts. This will support Helms School programs for cultural awareness. In support of this objective, Mr. Spahiu mentioned the prospect of having Helms School students serve as interns in the Embassy. Dr. Steven Samson, who is charged with developing LU's



Dr. Steven Samson & Mr. Avni Spahiu

graduate program in government, underscored the need for the development of academic initiatives that can be coordinated with some of the Embassy's educational and cultural programs. Another likely feature of the Kosovo Embassy - Helms School relationship is that Kosovar representatives, including the Ambassador, will arrange to visit the Liberty University campus in order to discuss the

development of Kosovo and explain this new country's vision for itself in the international arena.