Kosovo and the International Community: the Democratisation Dilemma

1. Introduction

Kosovo is an inspiring case-study for investigating democratisation policies between theory and practice. On the one hand, democracy has played a central role in the recent development of post-conflict peace-building and state-building policies, two processes directed by a plethora of actors representing the international community. On the other hand, the new Republic of Kosovo born officially on the 17th of February 2008 proposed itself to the international community as the outcome of Kosovo’s people revolt after a period characterised by troublesome and undemocratic Serbian misgovernment, and it advocated instead an independent democratic state. In this perspective, the Declaration of Independence crucially highlights the achievements of Kosovo in developing “functional, multi-ethnic institutions of democracy” during the post-conflict years. It also declares Kosovo to be “a democratic, secular and multi-ethnic republic”. As a matter of fact, the insistence on the democratic character of the new state, as well as the welcoming of peace-builders and the adherence to the roadmap for peace- and state-building enshrined in several official documents mentioned in the declaration, reflects the preferences of the international community and it is a clear signal directed at reassuring its members and obtaining their recognition. However, the current debate on Kosovo shows that the democratic record of the new state is not so encouraging: since 1999 there have been improvements in several domains – e.g. electoral occasions – but well-known, enduring problems such as corruption and social unrest put the quality of Kosovo’s democracy at risk.

This paper analyses the dilemma that ‘democratic peace-builders’ encounter in Kosovo presently. In order to do so, it starts focusing on the debate about post-conflict democratisation
(or democratic peace-building) in the context of the wider discourse of the advantages of democracy for domestic as well as international affairs that seems to permeate the most influential approaches to post-conflict development policies. Then, the paper briefly presents the case of Kosovo in its post-conflict developments: it provides the reader with basic information on the historical events leading to independence and it identifies the main actors involved in the process. Finally, the mainstream vision of peace-building proposed for Kosovo by the international community and formally internalized by Kosovo ruling élite is sketched, followed by a brief overview of the main obstacles that democratisation is facing nowadays.

2. Peace-building challenges: stability, growth and democracy

Several commentators point out that within the framework of a wider debate on interventionism, at present the reflection about the desired and unintended outcomes plays a central role, in the reflection of both policymakers and academics (Mitchell 2009; Youngs 2004). This seems to be an actual issue, because of the uncertainties about the (mis)match between the stated goals and the present outcomes of the Western interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Both interventions have been justified at least in part by their promoters (the US especially) with the need to transform those countries’ regimes, freeing their citizens and helping them out to establish democracy (Paris and Sisk 2009). However, this is a relatively new phenomenon: during the past decades attempts to democratize third countries normally followed an intervention aimed at stopping an armed conflict – international or domestic. This was the case, for instance, in the Balkans. Peace-builders often considered democracy to be the best form of government for reconstruction periods. Richmond (2002) summarised this tendency with the expression of *peacebuilding consensus*:

“a nascent discourse and practice of both means and ends. This includes methods for the amelioration of conflict through mediation, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, conflict resolution, prevention, and transformation approaches, and development strategies incorporating multiple actors in a multidimensional process. (...) The outcome of this process is projected as a construction of liberal democracy, with a free market and globalized
economy, progressive development strategies, and guaranteed human rights. This consensus exists only in theory, and as an assumed ideal type in the context of international organisations, institutions, agencies, NGOs, and liberal states”.

At the same time, an influential representative of the international community, Kofi Annan (2002: 138) advocated for the UN and its member states to adopt a more proactive approach to democracy promotion in order to further the enjoyment of good governance and human rights – both in post-conflict situations and in countries experiencing a transition period after the end of an authoritarian regime.

Supporters of the ‘democratic peace-building’ tend to see peace-building and democratisation as two mutually reinforcing strategies to adopt in post-conflict situations (Burnell 2006). Peace-building and democratisation are two analytically distinct process, although recently they have often been associated. There are many definitions and descriptions of peace-building, and even within organisations as the UN and the EU the conceptual understanding often differs. Peace-building, in its narrow definition, starts after peace-making and peace-keeping and it is practiced in post-conflict support of peace accords and the rebuilding of war-torn societies. Although democratisation efforts start immediately after the end of a conflict, during the phase of peace-building, they are normally developed during the following moment, when state-building (or reconstruction) processes are at stake and the institutional design is put in place alongside with the diffusion of democratic practices. A wider definition of peace-building functions as some sort of umbrella concept for the entire peace process, including peacemaking and peacekeeping activities, such as violence prevention, civilian and military peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, peace agreements and so forth. In this sense, democratisation policies constitute a part of post-conflict peace-building. Following Barnett and Zürcher (2009: 26), it seems more helpful from an analytical point of view to consider democratisation policies as belonging to that part of peace-building which has to do with state-building, which means with “the specific instruments states use to control society” and “the organizing principles that structure the state’s role over society”.

The debate over peace-building and democratisation concerned particularly the opportunity for peace-builders of channelling conflict into democracy, setting as top priorities for the reconstruction the institutional design and the planning and fulfilment of electoral moments. As a matter of fact, the optimistic approach characterising the ‘peace-building consensus’ based
on the active support to democratisation in post-conflict societies has been questioned from different perspectives. However, this is still the mainstream approach within the international community, and it permeates especially UN-, EU- and OSCE-style peace-building policies. This democratising approach to peace-building is explicit in their official documents as well as in the long-term projects focused on democracy and human rights promotion that they run in different countries. For instance, the European Union has a programme, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), replacing the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. This programme devotes a budget of 1,104 million euros for the 2007-2013 period for democratisation policies in third countries, for a wide range of actions which address five priorities: 1. the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms; 2. the involvement of civil society in democratisation processes (through a bottom-up approach complementing the top-down approach consisting in democratising the ruling élites); 3. stimulating debate and actions on specific issues, such as the abolition of the death penalty or the problem of violence against women and girls; 4. support to the regional and international framework for the protection of human rights, justice, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy; 5. enhancing the reliability and transparency of democratic electoral processes. Similarly, the OSCE established in 1991 ODIHR, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, based in Warsaw. ODIHR observes elections, promotes and monitors respect for human rights, and runs democracy assistance projects throughout the OSCE region. Finally, the UN when operating in post-conflict situations pursues a more development-oriented approach as it stresses especially the keywords of accountability and good governance, normally avoiding to express a clear preference for (a specific model of) democracy (Carothers 2009). However, as then secretary general Kofi Annan said it, the UN “find itself increasingly involved in democratization”, because democracy is seen as crucial not only for international peace but also for development and for the universal protection of human rights.

Even from this brief sketch of the democratisation initiatives driven by the main international organisations committed with peace-building, it is clear that there is within the international community a special attention to the political character of post-conflict outcomes. At the same time, at least a relevant part of the international community shows to prefer democratic outcomes considering them to best serve the objectives of regional as well as global stability, protection of human rights and development (International IDEA, 2008: 15).
Two main problems underlie the debate about democratisation policies in third countries. First, defining democracy is challenging and in different contexts often democratisation promoters (foreigners) and democratisation addressees (locals) use the same word to refer to different models of democratic government; they understand different things and they may exploit this ambiguity to pursue their own priority objectives (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Noutcheva 2007; Frankson and Richmond 2008). Second, because of this difficulty, envisaging the institutional design for a new democracy as well as planning the democratisation policies in order to minimise interference while maximising the probabilities for success has proved to be a hard task, especially in societies that have been fundamentally transformed by conflict dynamics (Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Burnell 2006). Political support (both domestic and international) in this phases is crucial both for democratisation promoters and for the democratising élites, and during long and fragile processes this support tends to weaken when the progresses are slow or uncertain (International IDEA 2008; Zürcher 2011). Furthermore, the democratisation can be only one of the problems for peace-builders to care about: especially, the balance and the intertwining between policies aimed at democratizing a particular society and development-oriented policies which pursue economic growth and integration in the international markets is crucial (Carbone 2009; Carothers 2009). When problems arise, the definition of priority goals risks to undermine the ‘peace-building consensus’: stability, security, fund-raising problems can provoke a stalemate situation for democratisation processes and divide the international community on the very opportunity of undertaking such processes (Burnell 2006; Heathershaw 2008).

Three other points are often criticized about democratic peace-building – its utopian character; its liberal (hegemonic) universalism, its unfairness. For the sake of the explanation, it is worth recalling the main claims of these critiques here. Firstly, a powerful critique to post-conflict democratisation is directed to the liberal character of the equation between democracy, domestic peace and international peace. Some authors argue that this equation is based on the well-known ‘democratic peace’ argument. This argument, in its many declensions which form a rich literature, is based on the Kantian claim that democracies are more prosperous and peaceful than other regimes. Thus, a world where all the states were democratic would bring advantages to humankind as a whole: peace and progress. However, both theoretically and empirically, the ‘democratic peace’ hypothesis cannot be confirmed nor refuted in toto; therefore, it should not be considered as a dogma founding liberal interventionism and peace-
building approaches (Levy 2010). Secondly, some opponents of democratic peace-building reject the liberal claim that democracy is always the best solution for any people in any country in the world. They maintain that every people has to decide on its preferred form of government according to its own political and cultural framework, and democracies should not attempt at transforming other countries through template models of democracy which appear Western-biased, paternalistic and hypocritical. Thirdly, some argue that the focus on the desired outcomes – the ‘ethics of the liberalizing peace’ has lead peace-builders to underestimate the impact that conflict normally has on societies, making it difficult to effectively contrast the conflict’s legacies. This would lead peace-builders to propose peace settlements which are actually ‘conflict-in-transformation’ scenarios: thus, not “a way out of conflict, but rather a choice between alternative forms of conflict” (Mitchell 2009: 681). ‘Conflict-in-transformation’, perpetuating a situation of structural violence, would in the long run undermine the democratic institutions that the international community, through the peace-builders, aims at establishing.

Notwithstanding the many doubts about democratisation policies in post-conflict contexts, peace-builders are always keen to promote democratisation as a way out of conflict. Critiques have helped to rethink the approach to democratic peace-building insofar as it has stimulated the search for original ways of overcoming its weaknesses. For instance, calls for more participation of locals – both governmental and civil society actors – in the planning and implementation of policies as well as for the need of acquiring a better knowledge of post-conflict situations before any intervention have been formulated by scholars and by NGOs (Zürcher 2011: 94; Levy 2010: 30). Further research on the matter seems to confirm that the addressees of democratisation policies would need a different engagement from peace-builders, and the bridge between democratisation and development policies as well as the active inclusion of locals through a mix of top-down and bottom-up strategies would be welcome news (Youngs 2010). Finally, it seems that the critiques have been received by advocates of democratic peace-building; hopefully, they can serve as starting points to develop a new, more inclusive and effective approach (Galtung and Tisné 2009: 106).

3. Kosovo: conflict, peace-building and the contested independence
Kosovo declared its independence on 17 February 2008. Before this date, it had been an ‘internationally supervised’ territory claiming for independence from Belgrade for nine years. One of the first areas in the Balkans where violence erupted in the 1980s, it knew full-fledged warfare several times during the 1990s. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at that time comprised the territories of actual Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Slobodan Milošević built his political fortune appealing to Serbian nationalism through aggressive policies and it denied Kosovo of the autonomous status it had enjoyed within Yugoslavia since 1974, when the Constitution de facto equated Kosovo’s status with that of the Republics of the Federation. This initiative reinforced the Kosovo Albanians’ demands for full independence, based on the right to self-determination because of the Albanians’ different social and cultural background as well as their rejection of Serbian authoritarian ruling. From early 1998 to 1999 a war was fought between the army of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a Kosovo Albanian guerrilla organisation aiming at the independence for Kosovo.

As the situation was deteriorating, especially regarding the protection of human rights, the international concern over Kosovo aroused, and the fear of another situation similar to the Bosnian – with mass executions and murderous warfare within a planned ethnic cleansing campaign as the norm and thousands of refugees risking to destabilize neighbour countries – eventually lead to the launch of a bombing campaign by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Being impossible to obtain a mandate resolution within the UN Security Council because of the staunch opposition of Russia – Belgrade’s traditional ally – and China in defence of the sovereignty principle, the campaign was launched with an explicit humanitarian intent on March 24, 1999.

The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia remains a controversial issue: during 78 days Serbia and Kosovo knew relevant material damages and thousands of people were displaced – either domestically or internationally, forcefully or as a consequence of fighting. The war left enduring traumas on Kosovo’s society, because of the neat separation and violent confrontation of two groups, the Kosovo Albanians and the Kosovo Serbs, which is still a worrying feature of post-conflict Kosovo. Eventually, an agreement was negotiated that requested the UN to deploy a peace-keeping mission and to take over the administration of Kosovo. Subsequently, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1244, which mandated the UN Interim Administration
Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). At the same time, a NATO armed force (KFOR) supervised the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo territory while providing security for the populace – particularly in Kosovo’s ‘hot spots’ where concentrations of Kosovo Serbs lived – and for international peace-builders. UNMIK has remained active up to now, dealing with the task of peace-building in Kosovo, supervising elections and the Provisional Institution for Self-Government (PISG), in the perspective of a cautious transition of power with an open formula – which means, avoiding to opt for or against the demand for independence from Serbia. OSCE launched a permanent mission in Kosovo – which is still working, directed at operating the “lead role in matters relating to institution- and democracy-building and human rights” which UNSC Resolution 1244 assigned to it, mainly in a multilateral cooperative framework with the UN and the EU. Since 2001, Kosovo elected officials have been cohabiting with UNMIK, which could advice, direct and veto their behaviour in a wide range of areas. The well-known policy of ‘standards before status’ adopted by UNMIK pushed Kosovo’s authorities to engage in policies of reconciliation and democratisation as a necessary precondition to start talking about the possibility of independence from Serbia. During the UNMIK-led transition period, the separation from Belgrade was vocally advocated by Kosovo’s main political parties, such as the League for Democratic Kosovo (LDK) led by Ibrahim Rugova, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) of Hashim Thaçi and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) of Ramush Haradinaj.

The status talks began eventually in 2006, when the EU – already present in Kosovo with cooperation projects held in tandem with the UN – became more involved through the adoption of the EU Partnership Action Plan for Kosovo, envisaging targets to guide the reform process and a system of periodical reporting and monitoring in order to assess the progresses achieved. Independence was supposed to be internationally supervised, based on the detailed Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement drafted by the UN Secretary General’s special representative, Martti Ahtisaari, in conjunction with the document Report of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Kosovo’s Future Status. The Ahtisaari plan, as the overall scheme contained in the Ahtisaari Report and Ahtisaari Proposal is often referred to, never obtained the Security Council’s approval but nonetheless it has been endorsed by the international actors operating in Kosovo. The government in Pristina pledged to implement it, and the countries that have recognised the new state have done so largely based on that commitment. In the plan, after a round of talks between Kosovo and Serbia representatives, Ahtisaari pointed out the existence
of two mutually exclusive positions – substantial autonomy vs. full independence – and he foresaw little room for compromise; thus, he urged the UN to solve the problem unilaterally, accepting Kosovo request and supervising its independence.

The declaration of independence of 17 February 2008 officially bound the Kosovo elected government to the following undertakings:

- to “implement in full” the obligations set in the Comprehensive Proposal for Status Settlement (art. 3);
- to write a Constitution in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and incorporating the principles of the Ahtisaari’s plan (art. 4);
- to welcome the international community’s support for Kosovo’s democratic development and to cooperate with the international forces present on the territory: namely, UNMIK, the EU-led rule of law mission, the international civilian mission – led by the International Civilian Representative/EU Special Representative for Kosovo – monitoring the implementation of the Ahtisaari’s plan, and NATO military cooperation mission (art. 5);
- to pursue EU membership and Euro-Atlantic integration ‘as soon as feasible’ (art.6);
- to operate according to the principles defining responsible membership in the international community as they are set in the UN Charter and in the OSCE Helsinki final act (art. 7).

The government in Pristina was immediately supported by most of the EU Member States – with the notable exceptions of Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – and the United States. However, the independence is still a contested issue: Serbia – backed by Russia – does not recognize Kosovo. Internationally, the Kosovo case triggered a debate on who is entitled to secession/independence and which rules apply in similar situations. Until 2008, the dissolution of former communist federations had happened along the borders of the constituent republics. Kosovo was the first sub-republican unit to become a new independent state. At Serbia’s request, the unilateral declaration of independence was referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. In July 2010 the Court delivered an advisory opinion on the unilateral secession that ambiguously found that Kosovo’s declaration of independence from Serbia did not violate international law. However, the dispute on Kosovo remains: formally, UN Resolution 1244 – which considered Kosovo as a part of the Federal Republic of
Yugoslavia – is still in force, as no further agreement on Kosovo could be reached within the Security Council.

In June 2008 – when the Constitution of Kosovo was approved by the National Assembly – UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced the start of a new phase, that of ‘reconfiguration’, meaning the reorganisation of international presence in Kosovo in the view of the new situation. This process involved the downscaling of UNMIK mission and the stronger involvement of the EU, performing a more technical assistance programme for capacity building and monitoring the democratic record of state institutions. EULEX – the rule of law mission operating in Kosovo – reached full operational capability in April 2009. At the same time KFOR started a programme of downsizing: its second phase was completed in March 2011, bringing troop levels to approximately 5,500. So far, it has especially worked on electoral assistance and monitoring and in civic education campaigns.

Commentators at the beginning of 2008 observed that “the internationals [were] suffering from ‘Kosovo fatigue’” because of the long-term involvement on the ground and the persistence of evident problems for the post-conflict transition process – as shown dramatically in March 2004 anti-Serbs violent riots – and they were looking for a way-out (Franks and Richmond 2008: 90). Yet the international presence in Kosovo is remarkable: international organisations’ agencies and international NGOs created a web that protects – or maybe imprisons – the new state’s institutions and policies anchoring them to the principles on which the international community could find an agreement. Furthermore, at least another important player affecting the situation in Kosovo nowadays has to be mentioned: Serbia, the outraged neighbour, still manoeuvres for boycotting the efforts aimed to build a multiethnic state and alleviate inter-group tensions, ‘protecting’ Kosovo Serbs with a wide range of policies – for instance employing them, providing Serbian pensions, supporting the political parties of the Povratak/Return Coalition. Internationally, Serbia still counts on Russian support and on the preoccupation of other states for the impact of the ‘Kosovo precedent’ on separatist movements to advance the claim of the illegality of the new state. To sum up, Kosovo shows quite clearly how the international community and the balance within it at any particular moment can empower or limit any actor whose status is contested. Particularly, in post-conflict contexts the presence of the international community and the choices made in peace-building
planning and implementation affect not only the international status of a country, but also the shape and strength of its institutions.

4. The democratisation dilemma in independent Kosovo

Twelve years after the start of post-conflict reconstruction, it is not easy to assess the democratisation process undertaken by the international community in Kosovo. This is due to three main reasons. First, the concept of democracy escapes any clear-cut theoretical definition and it is even more difficult to operationalise; the same happens with democratisation and particularly with what successful democratisation means (Schmitter 2009). Second, the democratisation process encompasses several policies which often belong to different programmes undertaken by different actors – international organisations, local and international NGOs, different levels of local government – and it is not easy to trace the path of a coherent democratisation policy/process. Third, the case of Kosovo has to be considered as an exceptional case, and for this reason it is difficult to confront it with other cases of democratisation: the conflict and post-conflict legacy, the length of direct international involvement, the socio-political and economic pressures to which the new state found itself vulnerable, the fragile regional balance and particularly the tense relationship with Serbia are only some of the problems that Kosovo’s government and democratic peace-builders have to face.

Notwithstanding the objective difficulties of assessing the fruits of democratisation so far, it is possible to find some evidence of a nuanced landscape: while on several domains there have been remarkable progresses, by contrast on other domains there have been ups and downs, or even regressive tendencies during the last years. Generally speaking, “Kosovo today remains a low-income post-conflict country characterised by weak institutional capacity and state legitimacy, lacking control of the whole national territory; without monopoly on the use of force, and an inability to provide core functions and basic services to citizens” (Montanaro 2009: 5). According to standard definitions, with respect to its state-building progress Kosovo
can be described as “a poor performer, a weak state, a shadow state, or as a neo-patrimonial state or quasi-state”. Although the state-building record is not identical to the democratic record, it shows a fragility which in part explains the slowness of democratisation (Kapstein and Converse, 2008). At the same time, the international supervision on Kosovo has not prevented the emergence of post-conflict dynamics which constitute serious obstacles to the functioning of state institutions and to their democratic character – such as the lack of social capital within a weak and divided civil society, warlords’ control of parts of the territory, Serbian continuous meddling in Kosovo domestic affairs constituting a parallel power to that of the Kosovo government, the size and relatively effectiveness of criminal economic webs and a pervading corruption system, external dependency from international community, and a leadership which was legitimised in wartime and often escapes accountability mechanisms.

Some tentative conclusions on the democratic record of today’s Kosovo can be drawn on the basis of the data provided by Freedom House and easily accessible on the NGO’s website. In 2011, Kosovo is considered to be a ‘partly free’ country – while in the period 2004-2008 it was ‘not free’. Curiously, it had been considered ‘partly free’ already in 2003-2004, after the first years of UNMIK’s control of the reconstruction process. Thus, it seems that in the medium term there has been an improvement in this sense, although the progress has not been linear at all. However, a Freedom House 2011 report found that the country’s democracy score [an index which is the average of the scores in different domains in a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest] during the last years shows a tendency to decrease, although smoothly. Moreover, the report points out that the coalition government led by Prime Minister Thaçi governed ineffectively and non-transparently until October 2010, when it collapsed. Then, the early elections held in December were found to be flawed, and consequently rescheduled for January 2011. “Owing to the government’s continued failure to improve its performance, Kosovo’s national democratic governance rating worsens from 5.50 to 5.75” (Freedom House 2011: 287). Similarly, electoral process rating worsened as a consequence of irregularities due to both technical problems and episodes of intimidations; media independence rating worsened because of the continued decline in the position of journalists and the insufficient implementation of constitutional guarantees on media freedom. As far as other areas are concerned – local democratic society performance, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, corruption – the situation is not rosy but the ratings show to be stable. However, some positive signals have to be mentioned too. While the
situation between the communities is still tense, levels of inter-group violence in day-to-day life decreased considerably. Moreover, on 7 April 2011 a policewoman – Atifete Jahjaga – was elected by the National Assembly with only one vote as the President of the Republic, replacing a well-known Kosovo Albanian businessman – Fatmir Sejdiu – whose election was considered unconstitutional by the Kosovo’s Constitutional Court because he could not simultaneously serve as state president and head of his party, the LDK. Already in 2005, then-Prime minister Hamush Haradinaj stepped down immediately when he was charged of war crimes during the Kosovo War of 1999 by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague. These facts show that the functioning of democratic review institutions is effective at the highest levels, and that there is some mobility within the local and national élites. However, the judicial system is still ineffective, especially as far as corruption crimes and organised crime networks are involved. Overall, the EULEX mission has a poor track record of investigating and prosecuting crimes, which continues to hamper effective rule of law in Kosovo. This is also due to the mission’s limitations, and indirectly to the non-unanimous position of EU member states on Kosovo’s status: EULEX has some 20 prosecutors and 30 judges deployed in Kosovo, and the judicial system is totally dependent on them.

From the perspective of democratic peace-builders, the situation in Kosovo is extremely complex. Particularly, Kosovo is now highly dependent on international peace-builders, both for the domestic as well as for the external support to its institutions. Despite the injections of huge diplomatic, security, financial and human resources into Kosovo over the past decade, it seems that the international community has not managed to support a process of laying the foundations of a strong state and a peaceful society. Instead of reducing Kosovo’s fragilities, international intervention and donors’ diverging approaches have consolidated them. A clear example is that of the distortions to the economy caused by the inflow of foreign capital, which has often served to fuel corruption and criminal-advantaging dynamics (Freedom House, 2011). Another example concerns the links established by peace-builders with some NGOs rather than others, both international and local, and their poor accountability record.

Donors’ approaches in Kosovo have failed to foster economic growth. Kosovo’s per capita GDP is the lowest in Europe; unemployment is extremely high – within a very young population: 70 per cent of Kosovars are under 30. In a post-conflict and fragile environment such as Kosovo, youth unemployment may contribute to social unrest. Female unemployment
in Kosovo is likewise high at over 70 per cent, and gender imbalances in the economic system are the norm. It has been observed by many commentators that international actors have focused predominantly on security, ignoring the role that equitable economic development can play towards peace. As a matter of fact, Kosovo has had one of the highest concentrations of security personnel in the world: one police officer or soldier for every 40 persons. Moreover, about 80 per cent of the aid allocated to Kosovo was reported to be delivered as technical assistance and international salaries, meaning the majority of the funds were being recycled back to donor countries. To sum up, so far the international community and particularly the EU, which was in charge of the economic pillar under UNMIK, failed to develop Kosovo’s economy, build infrastructure or create jobs.

Furthermore, some commentators highlight that the international engagement in Kosovo has been too long and the achievements in promoting ‘local ownership’ were too frail (Narten 2009: 252):

“External state-building interventions in postwar societies have a common denominator: they all aim at building functioning and self-sustaining state structures, which would, at a later stage, allow external statebuilders to complete their mission and to withdraw from that country, making their capacities available for other regions in the world. From the global or international perspective, this is the main reason why local ownership in statebuilding processes matters. Without a successful handover of control and competencies from external statebuilders to local actors following a period of international involvement, statebuilding missions would either become open-ended and extraordinarily costly, or the missions would come to a sudden end without generating sustainable and self-sustaining local structures”.

Local ownership, according to Narten, requires the gradual transfer to legitimate local representatives of functions, assets and capabilities exercised by the international actors during the transition period. Indeed, local ownership is a crucial indicator for evaluating the level of democratisation, because it is normally assumed that a democracy is self-sustaining, insofar as its own government and civil society are the responsible of a given country; otherwise, it is the case for incomplete democratisation in disguise or for ‘tutelage’ (Noutcheva 2007; Tansey 2009). Nartens (2009) identifies three key dilemmas faced by the international community in promoting local ownership (over democratic institutions): 1. avoiding too much external intrusiveness in Kosovo’s affairs while fostering responsible self-government both at the municipal and national levels; 2. reconciling short-term pressures for accomplishing the task quickly and long-term needs for helping the building of a no-longer-dependent, sustainable and
effective democratic system; 3. identifying appropriate local partners while avoiding to empower those who during the conflict were ‘entrepreneurs of violence’, i.e., keeping as equidistant as possible between former opposite groups. There are examples which illustrates all these dilemmas. 1. The long-term presence and the ‘reconfiguration’ of international organisations in Kosovo acting as ‘active supervisors’, having veto powers in the case of the Secretary General’s Special Representative and now of the EU Special Representative, shows not only that Kosovo’s government has a limited margin for autonomous action, but also that the international community is entrapped in Kosovo, insofar as there is at the moment no possibility of setting the withdrawal from the country and the international presence seems to be necessary in order to guarantee stability and social order. 2. The global financial crisis had an impact on donors’ aid, which has been dropping considerably since 2009 (Montanaro 2009: 15). At the same time, the many projects and the personnel who are working in Kosovo and who will be needed to stay there for several years require a constant flux of money which makes heavier for donors the political impact of peace-building outcomes. 3. The dispute about Kosovo’s status has been a powerful weapon in the hands of the international community to smooth Kosovo’s leaders as well as Serbian attitude towards Kosovo. However, it has been a card that all the players could use, alternatively, in different moments. For instance, though initially the UNMIK mandate demanded any decision on the status issue to an agreement between the part, eventually the independence declaration was unilateral and no agreement could be found on the matter. However, the independence was supported – and indeed wished, as the Ahtisaari’s Plan shows – by a majority of peace-builders. This risks to weaken the international community’s credibility in cases of peace-building, as some parties – the conflict’s ‘victims’ in this case – can exercise considerable pressure on peace-builders, orienting their preferences for post-conflict settlements (Franks and Richmond 2008).

5. Conclusion

A gap can be observed between Kosovo’s state-building needs and what the international community has done to reduce post-conflict fragilities: in numerous areas, international actors
and donors actually did precisely the opposite, and have to some extent consolidated those fragilities, with the result of keeping entrapped in a costly and never-ending peace-building engagement. One plausible explanation for this is that international actors’ approach to post-conflict reconstruction, based on the prioritisation of achieving short-term security at the price of long-term sustainable peace and economic development, was unhelpful to solve the dilemmas of democratisation in post-conflict Kosovo. Building peace implies changing bad habits, and transforming behaviours and structures, as well as addressing the underlying causes of fragility. In the case of Kosovo, international missions have lacked this understanding and the necessary courage to achieve this. The objective of immediate stability, and the appearance of reform by the domestic élite and the international mission, leads to the reinforcement of new, but one-party biased, state-society relations and patrimonial politics. Thus, a more structural approach would be needed instead. Particularly, reconciling political and developmental assistance schemes and better integrating democratic peace-building with programmes of socio-economic empowerment could be the starting point for elaborating a new approach. This should also include the promotion of a non-confrontational attitude, improved information and communication about international aid and peace-building objectives and progress, and a stronger commitment to use local skills and resources in planning, implementing and monitoring peace-building policies.
References:


