

## The Gazette

February 19, 2008, p. A-4

### [Kosovo] No secession lesson for Quebec: ex-refugees 5,297 chose Canada. 'It's paradise here, so why change it?' new Quebecer says

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It has been almost a decade since close to 850,000 ethnic Albanians in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo - about half of its population - became refugees, fleeing guerrilla warfare or expulsion by the Serbian government of then-President Slobodan Milosevic. Canada took in 5,297, including about 1,200 who came to Quebec.

For many, the exodus was short-lived. After NATO jets bombed Kosovo and Serbia in 1999 and a fragile peace was restored under United Nations tutelage, just under half of the refugees in Canada returned to their homeland. Hundreds in Quebec stayed behind, though, making new lives for themselves in Montreal, Brossard, Laval, Joliette and other centres.

Now, those new Quebecers are embracing a new kind of freedom - and facing an uneasy question.

Supported by the United States, France and Britain, Kosovo on Sunday declared independence from Serbia, and recognition by Canada may not be far behind - but for one sore point. That point is Quebec, and the potential precedent that recognition might have for the separatist movement here.

After all, if the international community - with the notable exception of Russia and China - can allow a province like Kosovo to secede unilaterally, why not Quebec, too?

It's a question quickly answered by the main voice for sovereignty in the National Assembly, the opposition Parti Québécois. In a statement Sunday, the day Kosovo went solo, PQ international relations spokesperson **Daniel Turp** said many Quebecers support "the idea of Quebec, like Kosovo, obtaining political sovereignty."

The PQ is keeping a close eye on how Kosovo goes its own way and from whom it finds support internationally, "including Canada," **Turp** said.

But Kosovars here - who adopted Canada as their new home and feel they've found, as some put it, "paradise" - see things otherwise.

Discounting the notion that newly "free" Kosovo represents some kind of model for Quebec to follow, they're happy to keep the status quo: a largely self-determining Quebec in a federal Canada.

"I absolutely don't see any parallel between what's happened in Kosovo and what could happen here," said Burim Berisha, 44, who was an economist before fleeing the Kosovo capital, Pristina, in April 1999.

Married and living in Rosemount, father of a son who goes to French school, he now works the overnight shift as a patrol supervisor for an alarm company.

"Quebec already had two chances to declare independence, and it didn't do it," Berisha said, referring to the failed referendums on sovereignty in 1980 and 1995.

"Quebecers like to make love, but they don't want a baby to be born - that's how it is with the politics here. Why? Because people have it too good. It's paradise here, so why change it?"

Kemal Murseli, 47, was a farmer and shopkeeper in Ferezai, a village in southern Kosovo. He now lives on welfare in a low-income flat in Côte des Neiges, with his wife and four kids. For him, Kosovo independence gives new meaning to a life impoverished by exile.

"I'm so happy for the the people of Kosova," he said, using the Albanian - not Serbian - suffix for his homeland. "We've wanted a country for so long, and now we've got it. I think Canada will recognize us now."

He doesn't think Quebec is in the same position, at all. "I stayed in Quebec so that my children can learn two languages, French as well as English, and also keep speaking Albanian. It will make them more independent, not Quebec. Quebec is fine like it is."

Ardian Vehari had a career as an accountant in Pristina. He now works as a dispatcher for a Quebec trucking company. On Sunday, he travelled to Ottawa to participate in a big pro-Kosovo rally on Parliament Hill to mark the declaration of independence - "it was a dream come true," he said.

"Even if Canada doesn't recognize a free Kosova, I'm thankful this country welcomed us and gave us a new home," said Vehari, who lives in LaSalle with his wife.

Though Serbia's government and Canadian ambassador have warned breakaway Kosovo sets a precedent for other independence movements, it isn't true for Quebec, he said.

"It's not the same situation; we don't even have similar histories. Quebec tried two times to be independent and lost both times. In Kosova, we had the Serbian army come in and the government remove people from their jobs and then expel us from our own country," he recalled.

"There's no comparison to the way Canada has treated Quebec."