

prime minister of Albania makes similar calls for U.N. approval of NATO action.

Officials in Tirane should start worrying more about what would happen to their country if the Kosova conflict spills over instead of worrying about whom NATO should consult before it moves.

As for Europeans, their one-step-forward, two-steps-backward policy concerning events in their own backyard will not get them anywhere. Europeans must shape up, or their so-called European Union will be nothing more than a heap of problems extremely difficult to solve.

Europeans should stop the empty rhetoric and act now.

LETTER

Their Finest Hour

Ever since the first of my visits to Albania in 1994, I have lost no opportunity to point out — with great admiration — how the unique bravery of the Albanian people succeeded in saving the lives of most of the country's Jewish population in World War II.

Albania's 2,000 Jews, many of them refugees, had been targeted for deportation and death by the German occupiers, as had all Jews throughout Nazi-ruled Europe.

Of course, *Besa*, the traditional Albanian code of honor, had much to do with this heroic response. *Besa* demands that Albanians protect those who are in danger and any "guests" in one's home. In one of the most shining chapters in Albanian history, ordinary citizens demonstrated extraordinary courage in defying the Nazis and shielding their Jewish neighbors. They aided the Jews in changing their identities, hid them in the cities and in the countryside and provided strong moral support.

The stories are legendary: There is Begir Qoqja, who was entrusted with a stack of gold coins for safekeeping and in payment for the expense of hiding Avraham Gani, his Jewish friend. When the war ended, Gani told Qoqja to keep a share of the coins. Indignantly the offended Qoqja refused. "My help to you was out of friendship," he declared.

Then there was Mefail Bicaju, who concealed five Jewish families in his

large country house and barn. Bandits found out about it and suggested he turn in the hidden families and share both the loot and the Germans' reward with them. Micaju told the bandits, "If anything ever happened to these people, my kin would be branded with shame for life."

It's a matter of record that Albanian guerrillas issued an order during the occupation that any Albanian refusing to provide refuge for a needy person would be subject to "execution for the crime of disgracing the Albanian people."

In recent years many Albanians who personally saved Jews have been honored both in Jerusalem and in Washington as "Righteous Ones Among the Nations." About 61 Jews remain living in Albania today. The rest of the community emigrated, mainly to Israel and the U.S.

Denmark, Finland, and Bulgaria have earned a place in modern annals for their sympathetic actions toward Jewish victims of the Nazis during the Holocaust.

But the compassionate and noble deeds of Albanian Moslems and Christians in saving their Jewish brothers have now, after 50 years of silence, been rightfully described as one of their history's finest hours.

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each other in an attempt to render them destabilized and powerless. Such was the fate of the Albanians, who were cut in half by some high-handed guys in London.

Since 1913 the Albanians have never had the chance to step back and, within an international forum of some kind, consider the boundaries that were handed them. The boundaries were intentionally drawn to divide them, to keep them unstable. They have succeeded. The Albanians' corner of the Balkans is, as yet, unstable.

But this is not due to any kind of genetic or ancient insanity on the part of the Albanians. They seek only what all nationalities seek — the time and safety to consider their unique identity in peace. It seems somewhat mysterious to certain of us Americans, who like store-bought white bread have lost much of our ethnic flavor, that human beings must undergo this journey, wherever they are, whenever they find themselves.

This search for identity is not new. It is at least as old as Moses and his followers in the desert. Older than that even. And guess what? It does not have to be destabilizing. Celebrate it instead.

Last week, Jan Oberg of the Swedish Transnational Fund suggested that there be a moratorium on the use of Yugoslav high school history books in Serb-dominated areas. They are, even now, so filled with inaccuracies and ethnic slurs that they are nothing but carriers of hatred. This is a truncated nation that doesn't know its own past. Kids growing up there can't distinguish fact from opinion or false information.

Richard Holbrooke's high-handed doctrine that allowing Kosovars the right to self-determination would set a terrible precedent and unleash a veritable cascade of nationalistic secessionism across the Balkans is

There is no way to go but forward. The idea of fanatical nationalism is fading fast with the proliferation of

The road up from colonialism . . .

personal computers. The Independent Students Union of Prishtine, for example has Web links all over the world. Get with the program, Holbrooke. The new generation of young Albanians is as global as the rest of us, yet they still yearn deeply for self-knowledge, just like the rest of us.

To insist that the Albanians must remain legally bound to the person directly responsible for their ethnic cleansing and must accept degrading brutality and total abrogation of

. . . as a people seeks its identity

their parliament and legal system, the dissolution of their economy and infrastructure, the destruction of the library and museums, the breaking of their family bonds, an inability to bury their dead properly, the lack of due process and a free press so that the West can follow through on a now obsolete dictum—"No Ethnic Ministates"—is absurd.

Were Germany's Jews told they had no choice but to form a small autonomous province within Germany, with Hitler as their president? Please explain to me how Kosova autonomy would be a stable solution to ethnic genocide and the seizing of land and borders for eco-

domestic goods. Do not believe they will ever gain recognition.

Restore dignity to Albanian achievements. Document the Kosovars' extraordinary peaceful resistance movement as well as the abuses of the Enver Hoxha regime and its concentration camps. Tell of the geographical wonder of Lake Oher, the wild mountain beauty and abundant natural resources.

5. Certify the University of Tetove in Macedonia, also recommended by the Carnegie Foundation. Bring outside resources there — i.e., the U.S. Information Agency's roster of distinguished guests to broaden and support the learning of these dedicated students and their faculty.

6. Provide broad-based democracy-building skills to Kosova — the Albanians never got a chance at the leadership and development projects all other ethnic groups in the Balkans got because they were considered part of Serbia. Trickle-down didn't reach that far for the most part. Their back pay, so to speak, should be sizable.

7. Put the citizens back to work. Let the deportees and refugees come home.

8. Immediately assign international lawyers to their negotiating teams.

9. Provide for a five-year normalization period. Kosova society has been totally shattered. Then, when its residents have had time to come home, hold a referendum working with the international group described in recommendation No. 1.

By that time, Albanians will know what their needs are and will be able to plan best for their future and for the future of those around them.

It would be whole lot cheaper this way.

The writer is an author of two books and a documentary on Kosova.