



2 July 2014. It has been said about Berndt Kouchner that he was more at ease in a refugee camp than in diplomatic negotiations.

Kosovo was the first time the former French Foreign Minister assumed leadership as an international official after a long career in French politics and international campaigning as co-founder of [Doctors without Borders](#) (Médecins sans Frontières, MSF) and [Médecins du Monde](#)



As a politician, Kouchner, a Socialist government minister (1988-1992, 1997-1999) pleaded for western interventions in the Balkan war, without success, until Kosovo. NATO intervened in Kosovo without a green light from the UN, but after [Security Council resolution 1244](#) of 10

June 1999, UNMIK, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, was established. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, appointed Bernard Kouchner as his Special Representative and head of UNMIK.

Amid violence and chaos, Kouchner assembled a closely knit team for the new mission. Among his close collaborators in Pristina were Nadia Younes and Jean-Selim Kanaan, who both lost their lives in the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003.

Kouchner participated recently in a ceremony in Brussels when the main conference room of UNRIC, the UN Information Center in Brussels, was named the Nadia Younes Conference Room in honour of the late UN Official by her former colleagues in the UN Department of Public Information.

### **The atmosphere has radically changed**

Árni Snævarr, Information Officer at UNRIC, talked to Mr. Kouchner on this occasion about lessons learned 15 years after Kouchner's leading role in establishing the UN administration in the region.



Bernard Kouchner : “You are right, 1999 – 2014 is a long time but in a different perspective it isn't, because for the peoples in the region and the people that fought each other about the definition of frontiers and for the nationalism that now seems to be on the rise, it is not long. One can say that this is not at all finished, but the way the dialogue between former enemies, Serbs and Kosovars, is conducted now, one can say that it is a big success for the United Nations. It is not over - but [the atmosphere has radically changed](#) . I was in Kosovo two months ago and it has changed a lot, of course largely because of money coming from Europe – one should not forget its role. All of this happened in our backyard, within two hours flight from all European capitals.

I think one can praise the tenacity of the UN. We governed in the place of those who were supposed to, which was Yugoslavia at the end of the day, but which was at the time disintegrating.

**«It didn't mean anything»**

So we arrived in 1999 on the basis of Resolution 1244 of the Security Council, which referred to

« Substantial autonomy ». What does that mean? Nothing! And we more or less did not define it so we wouldn't break any taboos, or challenge international laws. I was there for two years and we soon realized that the two groups would not be reconciliated right away and time was needed, a



long time, perhaps a generation. So we created a government – which was not foreseen in the resolution! In this case a taboo had to be broken and we established a government of two entities , on one hand the UN and on the other hand the others, including both Kosovars and Serbs. This improved little by little the atmosphere and facilitated dialogue but then it dragged on and on and on.... And legally in terms of international law Kosovo was still a part of Serbia and Yugoslavia. And we knew that this wasn't possible. Then there was the report of Martti Ahtisaari, which said in substance "this isn't possible", exactly what we, the people in the field, knew all along.

I had to try to explain this to the Security Council every two months, not least to the Russians and the Chinese :

- We cannot do otherwise.
- Yes but this is not according to the law.
- Yes it is not the law, but what if you have to kill everyone to apply the law?
- ...
- Now you see!"

**"Too much nationalism means war"**

Kouchner is, like many others, concerned about the rising nationalism. Talking about the Ukraine, he acknowledges that in some cases there are people who simply do not want to live together in the same state.

"The problem is the following: Are you willing to use all your moral, practical and even military power? Is one willing to do anything to make people live together even at the cost of terrible battles with a number of deaths. I am not sure."

"I remember quite well the words of François Mitterrand in his last speech to the parliament in Strasbourg. He said: "A bit of nationalism is the expression of our pride, our culture and is necessary. Too much nationalism means war." This still holds true. One sees that in the Ukraine, and more or less everywhere, and I think that Kosovo is an example that deserves meditation but "hélas!", unfortunately "history is without a memory" and people pass to the next issue, and at this time it is football that

# Kosovo 15 years later: Kouchner hails the success of the UN

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