

One minus six sometimes equals seven. ... The Republic of Kosova is the latest independent state to emerge from the former Yugoslavia. Amateur radio was there as the world's newest country declared its independence. Here, firsthand, is the story of YU8/OH2R.



YU8/OH2R Project Goodwill Kosova

BY MARTTI LAINE,* OH2BH/4O3B

The Balkan region has produced many newly-independent countries in recent years as a result of a sequence of historic events playing out, some peacefully and some not. Slovenia (S5), Croatia (9A), Bosnia-Herzegovina (E7), Macedonia (Z3), Montenegro (4O), and the new Republic of Kosova all were once joined with Serbia in the former Yugoslavia. Now each of them is independent, creating a new regional order and hopefully bringing greater stability within reach in that turbulent corner of Europe.

Kosova, the last of these countries to break away from Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia, declared its independence on February 17, 2008 with the support and immediate recognition of the United States and many leading European nations. As this is written in early May, Kosova is recognized by nearly 40 countries from all continents, including Australia, Canada, and Japan. On Kosova's independence day, the multinational ham radio group of G3TXF, N7NG, W3UR, OH2BH, OH2PM, and OH8NC was there to put the new nation on the air. Here is their story, shared with us by Martti Laine, OH2BH.

— W2VU

It all started in 1991 when we were in the process of carrying out the original Albania project (ZA1A). Not only were we activating for the first time the country that was then at the top of every DXer's needed list, but we were also helping that country's telecommunications administrators in regulatory mat-

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ters as well as training locals for this wonderful hobby of ours.

I had visited Albania regularly from 1970 through 1990 trying to convince them to allow amateur radio. I repeatedly met with Mr. Dajlan Omeri, representing Albania's radio frequency management agency, who appeared to be nodding his head approvingly when I talked of amateur radio. However, I discovered that the meaning of horizontal

and vertical nodding are reversed in Albania when compared to the rest of the Western world, and what I thought was a positive sign was instead a negative one!

There was a victory looming on the horizon, though, and it was to become a definite highlight of my ham radio career when Mr. Omeri joined our amateur radio course and issued himself the first individual Albanian ham license ZA1KAA, now ZA1Z. Mr. Omeri is one of the most active CW operators in Albania and chairman of its amateur radio association.

Assisting Mr. Omeri in those days was Mr. Frederik Kote, a knowledgeable young engineer with whom we wrote the first set of amateur radio regulations in Albania. Since my experience in Albania, amateur radio and DX have not been the same to me. Even though we enjoy the radio spectrum, especially DX-wise, I have learned to conduct these activities under a DX Missionary charter with the aim that the future of amateur radio in evolving societies should always be secured. Ultimately, Frederik Kote became head of



the Albanian radio frequency management agency, and we both went our separate ways.

Happy Reunion in 2003

When entering Albania for the second phase of the ZA1A project in 2003, integrating amateur radio into the programs of the Technical University of Tirana, I had the pleasure of meeting Frederik once again, now having a cup of coffee with him just when he had taken up an assignment with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), as head of the UNMIK Frequency Management Office (FMO). We had hoped to meet again one day in Kosovo, but little did we know that this day was indeed to come with a similar project in the newly born Republic of Kosova, as Kosovo is spelled in the Albanian language, which is also the official language of Kosova. *(With certain exceptions, we will be using Kosova in this article.—ed.)*

Recap of Kosova's History

Kosova, previously a part of Yugoslavia, is populated by nearly 2-million ethnic Albanians (90 percent) with a minority Serb population. The area is just the size of the state of Connecticut and it is a mountainous land with the capital, Pristina, some 1000 feet above sea level. It has a cold winter season with snow and ice. The area is well developed with good agricultural land, and the country possesses rich mineral resources.

In the 1990s, Kosova was engaged in a bloody conflict with Yugoslavia, seeking its independence. In 1999 NATO forces moved into Kosova to put an end to the brutal violence that had cost thousands of lives there.

The original Kosovo callsign indicator was YU8, with many stations on the air in the early 1990s. However, with unrest growing prior to the 1999 outbreak of hostilities, all radio equipment had been confiscated from the province's 1991 amateur radio population of some 200 hams. Also, while a 2001 Kosovo Radio Association (SHRAK) assembly was attended by 120 participants pursuing our hobby, none was on the air. Under temporary UNMIK administration, the United Nations issued foreign personnel the portable YU8 indicator. Kosova's status was still not resolved, however, and as amateur radio activity was considered to have security implications, no new licenses

were granted to local operators and no new callsign indicator was available.

2007 Kicks Off Everything

Seven long years after the NATO intervention, the U.N. finally launched the Kosovo peace process in March 2007 and invited Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, a former President of Finland, to lead the process as the Special U.N. Envoy for Kosovo. An overall plan was drawn up and amateur radio prospects were found to be in harmony with it as another meaningful activity in that evolving society. We are grateful to Mr. Ahtisaari for his support.

Following in the footsteps of the successful Project Goodwill Albania, a similar project was set in motion and detailed plans were drafted. This project took me twice to United Nations headquarters in New York, where I was delighted to learn how positively the prospects for amateur radio were viewed by the U.N. as a complement to its efforts in Kosova. Additionally, the preparatory phase took me to Kosova three times in 2007, where I was further introduced to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) personnel. With the support of the U.N. staff in New York as well as the local U.N. officials in Kosova, we had a firm start in developing the basis for amateur radio in what would one day become a free and independent Kosova. As a result of this, Project Goodwill Kosova was initiated.

We had invited several individuals offering valuable resources for the pro-



The "Newborn" theme was staring at us through our hotel window, and everywhere in the city. During the course of the festival, people came to sign their names on these tall, illuminated structures. (G3TXF photo)



Kosova's capital city of Pristina was very colorful in the days leading up to independence. Red Albanian flags dominated, as Kosova's new blue flag was only introduced as part of the independence ceremonies. (G3TXF photo)

ject in areas that were initially needed. Hans Timmerman, PB2T, was invited in his personal capacity and with his International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) profile¹ to oversee development of the regulatory part, as well as Nigel Cawthorne, G3TXF, who was to be in charge of the educational activity using selected RSGB training material just as we had used in Albania in 2003.

"Daily DX" editor (and QST DX columnist) Bernie McClenny, W3UR, was charged to be spokesman to the media, especially as the U.N. was indicating an

interest in promoting efforts for amateur radio within its organization in New York. In all, the project has nine international volunteers involved as of today, working at their own expense, wanting to experience something extraordinary. Without exception, they were and are very pleased with this project.

However, clouds were gathering on the horizon, and the United Nations process for a resolution was slow and painful. Even though we had a tentative plan for a 4U (United Nations) callsign block to be released for locals and for-



There were parties everywhere after independence was declared, even in the lobby of the Grand Hotel, with plenty of TV crews on hand to capture the moment. (OH2BH photo)



It was during the term of President Clinton when Kosova's future was secured by the deployment of NATO troops. This large billboard welcomes you to Bill Clinton Boulevard, dedicated as a "thank you" to America for saving their country. (OH2BH photo)

eign visitors, the U.N. was not able to proceed in any new Kosova matters or its overall plans due to internal resistance from some of its member states. Ultimately the Kosova issue turned out to be a unique case in which no U.N. process would work, given the specter of veto options being exercised in the Security Council. An immediate breakthrough proved impossible. Alternative avenues had to be considered.

New Hope Arises in 2008

With the presence of some 15,000 NATO troops on the ground, as well as 1000 U.N. civilian development personnel present, the process and a settlement were to come to fruition anyway. The United States, with its leading European and Asian allies, expressed support for Kosovo to declare its independence and finally a long march of nearly nine years was to come to an end.



A visit to the UNMIK Frequency Management Office. On the left is Mr. Fazli Shala, head of the office; in uniform is SHRAK Secretary Feti Fazliu, ex-YU8FF; next is the office's "licensing lady," Mrs. Hasije Habibi, who prepares each and every radio/TV license issued for Kosova; and finally, author Martti Laine, OH2BH. (OH2BH photo)

Inspired by the original U.N. plan, the world press was reporting a speculative date for the declaration of independence but we knew better, thanks to our position. The date was to be the 17th of

February 2008, and a delegation representing Project Goodwill Kosova was invited to be there on that historic day. Nigel, G3TXF; former ARRL Membership Services Manager Wayne Mills,

N7NG; Bernie, W3UR; your author, OH2BH; Pertti Simovaara, OH2PM; and Juha Hulkko, OH8NC, all were able to represent amateur radio on that emotional day when the people of Kosova celebrated their new independence.

Cold But Warm February Weekend in Pristina

The Project Goodwill Kosova members were housed in the heart of Pristina in two hotels. Part of the group stayed at the Grand Hotel, the site of the Press and Media Center where the President and the Prime Minister were to appear before foreign media delegations. The other half of our group was located at Victory Hotel, which stands as a symbol of free Kosova and is dedicated to those countries that have supported Kosova from 1999 to these days of independence.

It was a cold winter weekend in Pristina with some snow on the ground as we hoisted the new flag of Kosova together with our antennas at both locations; amateur radio was to be aired on that historic moment with all world media present. We were very nervous—indeed, truly scared—when erecting our antennas on the roofs of the highest and most visible buildings in Pristina. Those in charge of security measures at their rooftop posts were just smiling. No one knew whether the independence declaration would result in unrest, but thankfully there were no problems. Strict security measures were well in place, and amateur radio was looked upon positively on that bright day in Kosova.

We also paid courtesy calls on those officials who were involved in our project, and their smiles were broad and bright as the sun on this truly memorable day. We had hoped to sign "OH2R/Kosovo" on the air after the independence declaration. Although we had the complete informal support of the U.N. authorities for our operation, on a formal basis the U.N. did not want to promote the occasion or emphasize its role in changing the status of Kosova since its role in the peace process had not been successful.

Local U.N. dealings with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) have also had a complex history. An assignment of a country code for telephone dialing and routing was required, but it did not happen. Thus, if you ever call Kosova on the phone, you must use a country code for either Monaco or Slovenia. These countries, friendly to Kosova, have consented to



A statue of Skenderbeu, the national hero of all Albanians, is located next to the parliament building in the immediate center of Pristina. Martti, OH2BH, is pictured here with the project assistant, Mr Besim Ismaili. (OH2BH photo)

allow Kosovan traffic to utilize their telecommunications networks.

Obtaining a new prefix from the U.N. administration that would be consistent with the new status of Kosova for that historic day simply was not possible. The only call sign that the U.N. authorities would allow was YU8/OH2R. While we understood their reasons—the constraints of the U.N. position—we very much would have preferred a call sign with no reference to the Serbian ITU allocation. It was not to be. In the end, we were licensed by the United Nations Frequency Management Office, as advised by the U.N. legal office, as



The Grand Hotel was the main base for visiting delegates and the media, and the location of one of two stations set up for the YU8/OH2R operation. Note the pair of SteppIR verticals at the far left and center of the photo. (OH2BH photo)

YU8/OH2R. We participated in the official independence ceremonies, but immediately after YU8/OH2R was on the air from two locations sharing the moment with folks all over the world. Many “happy messages” rolled out and called people for a dance on the radiowaves; some 11,000 radio contacts were handed out in three days. You can look for yours online at <http://df3cb.com/logsearch/yu8/>. A new country had been born, with a slogan featured everywhere in the city: NEWBORN!

Kosova remained in an interim phase, that we would have understood. But it was totally unwarranted to extend that statement to a declaration that contacts from Kosova would continue to count as Serbia. The DXCC response looked like a rigid political position, one certainly not in harmony with U.S. foreign policy.

However, from many messages received, we believe that this will soon be corrected. We are mindful of the fact that the DXCC Desk got confused with the YU8 indicator, which pointed them

to Serbia. This surely must be corrected when our license is reviewed and accredited as the U.N.-issued license for radio operations from Kosova—a license authorizing such activity beyond the date of independence.

The YU8 prefix we used is obviously not a determining factor, but the authority and legality of the license and the issuing office is. Our use of an earlier prefix as such is firmly supported with a recent DXCC precedent—the previous new Balkan country, Montenegro,

Is This a New Country or Not?

After our initial operation, a great deal of confusion was created by the ARRL’s DXCC Desk. We certainly appreciated that Kosova was not approved as another DXCC country without proper procedures, even though the U.S. State Department had promptly announced U.S. diplomatic recognition of the new country. Nonetheless, it came as a complete shock to us, the people we worked with, and the Kosovan amateur radio community, when the ARRL announced within the timeframe of the celebrations that contacts from independent Kosova would count for Serbia², the country from which Kosova had seceded! Still today, in May 2008, we remain astonished. Is this to remain the ARRL’s official position?

Why did the ARRL throw cold water on the happy occasion with that bit of unfair news? It seemed as if the League was just firing at us, with an immediate release, without even studying our case. If it wanted to convey to ARRL members its position that the status of



The ham volunteers who offered their time and money to help develop a modern framework for amateur radio in Kosova. All these people have a dual role as the Project Goodwill Kosova draws resources from the ranks of the DX community. From left; Pertti, OH2PM; Nigel, G3TXF; Martti, OH2BH; Juha, OH8NC; Wayne, N7NG; and Bernie, W3UR. (G3TXF photo)

where the YU6 prefix was still used months after the independence declaration, and in which case it took several months for the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to officially release the dedicated 4O prefix for Montenegro.

Also, this situation has exposed an

underlying weakness in the DXCC criteria for validating a political entity, since Kosova is not targeted to become a U.N. member country any time soon, following the steps outlined in the Ahtisaari road map. For essentially the same reasons, dealings with the ITU do not suggest that a distinctive new pre-

fix for Kosova will be released in the near future.

Life Continues in Kosova

The United Nations was scheduled to discontinue its presence in Kosova by June 2008, when the European Union (EU) would assume an advisory role in those areas that need to be transferred from the U.N. to local institutions—i.e. the government of the Republic of Kosova. We will have some sad moments when saying goodbye to those who leave Kosova, but at the same time we are delighted to see those who will stay, continuing to work either under EU or local institutions. Our project will stand until such time as the local people appear on the air and provide us with those true native voices from Kosova.

The first draft of amateur radio regulations is under review, along with training material. I know that SHRAK President Sabit Zymberi, ex-YU8KT, is there in his remote village getting up every morning, waiting for this nine-year hiatus to come to an end and to turn on his radio. I would like to be present when that happens.

When I attended a SHRAK assembly session with Hysen, ex-YU8PR; Feti, ex-YU8FF; and Smani, ex-YU8DD, with the frequency management people, I realized that these nine years had united them even more strongly. We should welcome most heartily their return to the worldwide brotherhood of amateur radio. We know that they have been holding back those YU8 callsigns for nine years and we know that the European Union, in turn, will soon get the prefix matter sorted out for Kosova. We regret that the DXCC Desk did not know better and that it issued its statement that it intends to accredit radio contacts from Kosovar soil as Serbia.

Summary

Walking along the main street of Pristina, Bill Clinton Boulevard, I see people working hard and being grateful to those who have helped them into a new beginning with newborn hope for a better tomorrow. Although they suffer from high unemployment and a shortage of energy, and their educational system needs to be supported, they feel cold but their hearts are warm. I have learned to love these people and help them within the terms of amateur radio.

I have lived now for 20 years among the ethnic Albanians and have become one of them in my heart. My best moments are those in which amateur radio has helped them find a path to the wider world, whether in Tirana or in Pristina.



Hotel Victory in Pristina was selected as the base for the U.K. and American delegations. It is located at the end of Bill Clinton Boulevard and symbolizes not only Kosova's victory, but through a mini Statue of Liberty, their appreciation to the U.S. for its help. The SteppiR vertical adds to the occasion. (G3TXF photo)



Mr. Fazli Shala (center, wearing tie) is the successor to Frederik Kote as head of the UNMIK Frequency Management Office (FMO). With new regulatory work under way, his office acts as host for the project. It is Mr Shala who, together with U.N. legal office, signed the license for our radio presence in Kosova. (G3TXF photo)



The wording on the sign across from our hotel reads: "KOSOVA IS BORN — New Life is Born, New Hope is Born, New Future is Born, a New Country is Born." You cannot phrase it any better, DX-wise either! (OH2BH photo)

You people are worth our warmest thoughts, not just on our QSL cards.

Recently, I was sitting under an oak tree in the Northern Village³ with Jarmo, OH2BN, and the topic of the unfairness of this world was discussed. Jarmo pulled out an original text of Clinton DeSoto, W1CBD, from 1937, defining what would constitute a country for the then-new DXCC award.

In DeSoto's words, the basic rule is simple and direct. Each discrete geographical or political entity is considered to be a country. One cannot say it any better. We regained our faith, turned on our radios, and started to look for what might be on 20 meters that day.

Notes

1. Hans Timmerman, PB2T, is a member of the IARU Region 1 Executive Committee and Chairman of its External Relations Committee.

2. The ARRL's decision does not apply to CQ awards or contests. In mid-March, CQ announced that, based on U.S. government recognition, Kosova would count as a separate entity for its DX awards as of its independence day on February 17, 2008. Subsequently, the Deutsche Amateur Radio Club's (DARC's) Worked All Europe award committee voted to add Kosova to the WAE list, meaning that it also counts as a separate multiplier in the CQ World-Wide DX Contest and CQ DX Marathon.

3. For those who read everything literally, no, it was not a real oak tree or a real village. "Sitting under the oak tree" is a Finnish expression for having a serious discussion, and "the Northern Village" is a local reference to Finland itself, which has the world's second most-northerly capital.

Keeping Up with Kosova

You can follow the case of this fledgling Republic of Kosova by checking out the following websites:

<<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/2008/99611.htm>> gives you an immediate historical account of developments that resulted in the birth of the Republic of Kosova.

<<http://www.n4gn.com/yu8/>> takes you to a presentation of the amateur radio activation where the case of YU8/OH2R is spelled out.

<<http://www.kosovothanksyou.com>> gives you an overview of how the new republic makes progress in the international arena.

On the Cover

Bernie McClenny, W3UR (left), and Wayne Mills, N7NG (right), stand in front of a miniature Statue of Liberty on the roof of Hotel Victory, the leading hotel in Pristina, the capital city of Kosova. They were there in February as part of a multinational ham team that put the newly-independent country on the air on the day that it declared its independence from Serbia. Both Bernie and Wayne are very well-known DXers. Bernie is founder, Publisher, and Editor of the "Daily DX" and DX Editor of QST magazine. From 1999 to 2006, Wayne was the ARRL's Membership Services Manager, a position that—among many other things—put him in charge of the DXCC program while he served on the League staff.

The hotel, located on the main street of Pristina, at the end of Bill Clinton Boulevard, is dedicated to the people who helped this newborn country to keep its faith during nine years of terrible suffering. It was chosen as one of the two radio locations for the YU8/OH2R special operation on Kosova's independence day, and was the base for the U.K and U.S



members of the ham radio team. Six operators from three countries made more than 11,000 contacts in three days. See the accompanying article, "Project Goodwill Kosova," for complete details. (Cover photo by Martti Laine, OH2BH)