

[REDACTED]

visible by saying a few generous and well-chosen words in Serbian to mark the occasion.

Though backed by the US, Nato and, so far as Russia allows, the United Nations, the European Union would take the leading role in the new arrangements - Kosovo is, after all, in Europe, not Wisconsin - and place them in the larger perspective of becoming a member state of the EU. But that perspective should not be confined to Kosovo. It must extend to the whole region.

The EU has just signed what in eurojargon is known as a "stabilisation and association agreement" with Bosnia - an important step towards eventual membership. The EU should make it crystal clear, in public diplomacy directed at the Serbian people, that it very much wants to do the same for Serbia - the day after the first of the two war criminals Karadzic and Mladic is handed over. What is more, the Kosovans should ideally be persuaded to wait until after February 3, the currently scheduled date for the second round of Serbia's presidential election, in an effort to ensure that a last emotional spasm among the Serbs does not catapult an extremist into the presidential office in Belgrade. (Serbia should not, however, be allowed to put off Kosovo's independence any longer simply by postponing the election.)

Kosovo's coordinated declaration of independence, in February 2008 at the latest, would thus be accompanied by this strong European offer to the Serbs: trade the residual shell of formal sovereignty over Kosovo for the practical chance of a better future in the EU. With their mouths, most Serbs will still say no; in their hearts, they may start to say yes.

[REDACTED]