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New framework of cooperation

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AS IT is known, the Balkans were occupied by the Turkish from the end of the 14th century, an occupation that continued for almost 500 years. But with the strengthening of the Austrian-Hungarian empire at the end of the 17th century, its power diminished. One big demarcation of the political borders of the Balkans was made by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 and Serbia, Montenegro and Romania were made independent states.

The Albanians, unhappy with the Treaty of Berlin, organised the Albanian Movement of Prizren between 1878-1881 which went against the decisions of the Congress of Berlin, to protect their ethnic land. At the same time, they had to fight the High Gate (the High Gate of Stamboll) to create an autonomous Albanian state, but this movement was pressured with violence by the Ottoman army. The Albanians continued their revolt against Stamboll in 1899, 1908 and 1910. In the spring of 1912, Kosova was the first region to unfold the flag of the liberation revolt.

The representatives of the Albanian people, who came from the old Albanian lands including Macedonia and Cameria, gathered at the National Convention of Vlora, which declared on 28 November 1912 the National Independence of Albania and the inclusion of the entire ethnicity, which they were representing, in the nation-state.

But for all the efforts put in by the Albanians for the inclusion of the entire Albanian lands in the nation-state, at the London Conference in 1913, the big powers recognised only the act of the creation of the independent Albanian state while more than half the ethnic Albanian lands remained out of its borders, divided among three neighbouring monarchies (Serbia, Greece and Montenegro). The Albanian map today is the one that was designed in the above-mentioned conference.

The diplomatic relationship between Albania and Malaysia was established in June 1991 while the Republic of Albania opened its embassy in Kuala Lumpur in October 1993. In this period, the relationship between the two countries has strengthened on the basis of reciprocal interest and friendly feelings between the two peoples.

There has also been an exchange of visits at high level. Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed has visited Albania twice, once in 1993 and another time in 1995 while Albanian President Prof. Dr Sali Berisha visited Malaysia in 1994. A number of agreements have also been signed by both countries on trade, cooperation in economy, science and technology, on the avoidance of double taxation and investment promotion and the lifting of visas for both countries. A treaty between the Bank of Albania and Bank Negara has also been signed on payment arrangements.

There are three major investments by Malaysian companies in Albania. The International Commercial Bank of Malaysia has been operating there for the last four years while Penang Shipbuilding and Corp Sdn Bhd is doing a housing project in Tirana estimated at US\$24 million. Meanwhile, Terumo Holdings is constructing a complex-hotel project estimated at US\$33 million.

Albania is a small country with great potential for investment and more businessmen are sought to set up economic activities in it. There are a lot of new sectors in Albania to be explored by Malaysian businessmen who are invited by the Albanian Government to invest in the hotel, banking, industrial, infrastructure, textile and food sectors. A government-initiated privatization programme has begun to modernise the Albanian

economy.

There are many viable projects in Albania such as road construction, power plants, tourism and many others which will benefit from the participation of Malaysian companies. Albania not only offers tremendous opportunities but is also the gateway to various parts of Europe.

Albania has many things to learn from the Malaysian experience, especially in the building of highways, free trade areas, industrial parks, multimedia projects, IT business and telecommunications.

I would like to mention that Malaysia's stand on the Kosova issue has been encouraging and helpful to our country's foreign policy especially the press statements by the Prime Minister's Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the support shown for the resolution on Kosova at the Security Council of UN.

I would like to thank the Government of Malaysia, the people of Malaysia, Barisan Bertindak Kosova (Malaysian Youth Council), the New Straits Times, Utusan Malaysia, TV3 and such humanitarian foundations as the Malaysian Medical Relief Society organised by Dr Jemilah Mahmood and the Malaysian Sociological Institute of Research for their hard work and contributions to the people of Kosova.

The possibilities of cooperation between Albania and Malaysia are much bigger now especially after the ending of the crisis in Kosova. Now, Albania and the other Balkan nations are working hard together for the creation of a peaceful and secure region, to create an attractive environment for foreign investors under the Pact of Stability for South-East Europe.

The end of conflict in Kosova and its placing under the UN Administration has brought the beginning of a new phase of development which is expected to bring more peace, stability and democratic reconstruction in South-East Europe.

I would like to express my deep belief that Albania, in future, will be a part of modern Europe. The priorities of Albania's foreign policy is to be included in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, priority relationship with the US, close relationship with Italy and Greece as neighbouring countries, good traditional relationship with Turkey and intensive relationship with such important countries as Germany, Britain, France. It is also interested in a reciprocal relationship with other big countries with high influence in the international arena such as Russia, China and Japan.

The contribution and support which countries of West Asia gave during the Kosova crisis has created a new framework of cooperation which will serve as a base for passing to a phase even higher than our present relations with these countries.

We hope that with our hard work and the close cooperation of friendly countries, Albania will be able to achieve its aim of becoming a member of the EU and Nato in the near future.