



Kosovo, the appeal of Paratrooper General Barduani: «Politics is needed, peace cannot be built by the military alone»

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PRISTINA - 26 years after NATO's intervention in Kosovo, Major General Enrico Barduani, current commander of the KFOR mission, makes a strong and clear appeal: *«It is time for politics and diplomacy to take back the normalization process. The military part can only accompany»*. An invitation that comes at a time of political stalemate and frozen dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, while the NATO mission remains, even today, a pillar for security in the region.

At the KFOR headquarters in Pristina, Barduani gave an interview in which he outlined the state of the mission and the challenges that persist in an ethnically fragmented territory. A territory that, despite the deep wounds of the 1999 war, shows signs of economic and social progress,

but is still threatened by identity tensions and a stalled institutional dialogue.

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A long and complex mission

With over 4,700 soldiers from 33 countries – including 1,200 Italians – KFOR represents the longest-lasting peace operation of the Atlantic Alliance. Barduani, who has extensive operational experience in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, has repeatedly emphasized to NATO leaders that the military component cannot replace diplomacy. *«For too long, we have deluded ourselves that stability could be guaranteed solely by our presence. But without true political will, the risk is to remain prisoners of a precarious balance».*

Today's Kosovo, although marked by strong inequalities – such as the economic gap between North and South and an average salary of just 350 euros – appears visibly transformed. Remittances from emigrants have boosted construction and consumption, and universities are growing. However, ethnic conflict remains heated: 93% of the population is Albanian, 8% Serbian, and the rest belong to Bosniak, Romani, Turkish, and Egyptian minorities. A mosaic that is politically exploited, making every attempt at pacification fragile.

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The appeal to the international community

According to Barduani, *«sectoral interests, economic agendas, and the presence of organized crime continue to undermine mutual trust between the parties»*. Worsening the situation is the lack of real recognition between Serbia and Kosovo, despite the Brussels (2013) and Ohrid (2023) agreements. For this reason, the General calls for renewed international commitment and a shared vision among multilateral organizations.

To strengthen the sense of cohesion, Barduani has coined a Latin motto for the mission: *«Unitas Omnia Vincit»* – unity conquers all. A symbolic but powerful signal, emphasizing the desire to

keep the mission cohesive, even in the most complex moments.

Security as a prerequisite for dialogue

KFOR, in collaboration with EULEX and the Kosovo Police (KP), continues to ensure stability and prevent crises. It has done so even in critical cases, such as the attack on the Ibar-Lepenac water channel in November 2023 or in managing tensions along the administrative line between Kosovo and Serbia. *«Security – Barduani reminds – is the foundation on which any serious political process can be built».*

In dialogue with the local population, KFOR stands out thanks to the *Italian way to peacekeeping*. A method based on the empathetic ability of Italian soldiers, who through the LMT – Liaison Monitoring Team – operate daily among the population to understand their perceptions and needs. *«They are our advanced sensors»*, the general defines them, fundamental tools for preventing instability.

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The future: between normalization and collective commitment

Also concerning is the low political participation, particularly of Kosovo Serbs, who did not go to the polls in the February elections. The resulting parliamentary paralysis further hinders any progress.

Barduani concludes with a clear reflection: *«We cannot ignore that, after 26 years, KFOR continues to be perceived by 97% of the population as the most reliable institution. But we cannot remain alone. Bold diplomacy and more responsible politics are needed to overcome this stalemate and restore full hope to the Kosovar people».*

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