

Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia

The Council for Inclusive Governance organized on April 28, 2014, in Belgrade, a workshop for a number of Kosovo and Serbian analysts on the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The participants aimed to define a list of new issues that would contribute towards normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Though they listed several new issues, the participants recommended that the Brussels Agreement be implemented in full before the two governments take up these new issues.

The discussants agreed that whether the dialogue is considered a success or failure depends largely on the people's expectations and interpretations. Some Kosovo participants believed that Kosovo should have received a clear path to EU membership and the visa liberalization in exchange for the compromises it agreed to in Brussels. But others pointed out that the agreement dealt with the internal disputes in Kosovo, particularly in Kosovo's north, and Kosovo needs to meet another clear list of conditions for visa liberalization and EU membership.

Though many consider Serbia gained more from the dialogue, some Serbian speakers said that is not case. Serbia got the candidate status and the date for negotiations, but this simply the very beginning of the process. They expected that Serbia would have to make a lot more compromises during the negotiation process.

Many also said that the EU should not reward Serbia and Kosovo for simply doing their homework. "Agreeing to remove some obstacles to each other is not such a great success. It's something it should not have been there in the first place. It is a functional system of justice, competitive economy, depoliticized and professional administration that gets you the path," a speaker said.

Though a comprehensive agreement would be ideal, many speakers were skeptical of it. They instead suggested an incremental approach to the remaining issues.

The following is a list of issues the participants suggested.

- **Membership in Intergovernmental Organizations:** Though Kosovo according to the agreement is allowed to take part in gatherings of regional organizations, it is not able to become a member of any major international organizations and this prevents meaningful cooperation and integration. The participants suggested that this issue be on the agenda of the dialogue on full normalization of relations between the two countries.
- **Territorial claims:** Serbia's territorial claim of Kosovo poses a permanent obstacle to the normalization of relations. Many Kosovo speakers say it is difficult to normalize relations

with someone who claims your territory, and Belgrade will continue to be seen as a security threat in Kosovo as long as such claims exist.

- **Recognition of legal systems:** Belgrade and Pristina should find a way to recognize each other's judicial rulings and jurisdiction of only one system of courts in Kosovo. Currently, court rulings in Kosovo, such as on divorce, are not recognized in Serbia.
- **Security issues:** Very little cooperation between security institutions of Kosovo and Serbia exists. Even the minimal police cooperation is made possible through constant mediation of EULEX. The participants suggested that the two governments look for ways to establish and strengthen cooperation between their police forces, intelligence, and courts in order to better fight corruption and organized crime and improve relations. The participants also suggested resolving the issue of remaining parallel security structures in Kosovo's north, such as the Civilna Zastita.
- **Association/Community of Municipalities:** The Association should be formed soon after the Kosovo parliamentary elections. The Association should be inclusive and deal with concrete problems of the Serb community rather than simply become a political institution. Many noted that the Association could not be formed without the legal constitution of the local institutions in the north. Some suggested that the seat of the Association be in Gracanica.
- **Missing persons:** Fifteen years after the war, about 1800 people are still missing. Around 400 of them are Kosovo Serbs. Though the two governments have been cooperating in this area and many missing have been found, the participants said that the process should be intensified and the issue resolved. It is difficult to make substantial progress between the two countries when mass graves continue to be found.
- **Freedom of movement:** The freedom of movement as defined in the agreement should be revisited. Though people are allowed to travel to each other's countries, the border and insurance fees are astronomical. A Kosovo driver needs to pay a minimum of EUR 130 to cross the border. Though the Kosovo government has decreased substantially the amount for the Serbian drivers, it is still a problem for people of both countries. Removing political barriers and adding financial ones is not a solution.
- **Regulation of Serbian education and health system in Kosovo:** The Serbs dismantled parallel political institutions by taking part in Kosovo's elections, but have retained parallel service institutions—education and healthcare. The Kosovo Serb participants recommended that the presence of these institutions should be regulated and that the Kosovo's institutions do not decide to close them later.

Participants concluded that there is a lot of frustration regarding the implementation of the Brussels agreement, and suggested that in the future be a clear guarantor to make sure the implementation takes place within deadlines. Despite the criticism, the speakers said that it is too soon conclude that the agreement was not good, and begin to look for new models. They suggested searching for complementary actions instead of models to replace it. A speaker said that the agreement should be seen as a means, not an end. The agreement should be seen as a tool that eases business and social barriers and created new opportunities for cooperation at all levels.

Participants

Iir Deda, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development

Nenad Djurdjevic, Forum for Ethnic Relations

Dusan Janjic, Active Serbia

Leon Malazogu, Democracy for Development Institute

Engjellushe Morina, Prishtina Council on Foreign Relations

Ljubisa Mijacic, Zubin Potok

Naim Rashiti, Balkans Policy Research Group

Shpetim Gashi, Council for Inclusive Governance

Alex Grigorev, Council for Inclusive Governance

Igor Novakovic, Council for Inclusive Governance

Jean-Daniel Ruch, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland

Jovan Teokarevic, University of Belgrade