



Kosovo Albanian Interparty Consensus on Pristina-Belgrade Dialogue

Introduction

The Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) organized on December 10, 2012 in Pristina a roundtable for representatives of Kosovo’s Albanian parliamentary parties, government officials, and members of the civil society, including local non-governmental and media organizations.

The discussion provided an opportunity for participants to exchange their opinions in an informal setting on the ongoing Pristina-Belgrade dialogue. The participants identified some of differences among the Albanian parties regarding the dialogue with Belgrade and articulated a number of steps to narrow these differences down. They addressed the dialogue also from a more technical perspective, exploring topics and themes which, they believe, should or should not be discussed with Serbia. Another point of discussion was ways in which Kosovo’s civil society can contribute to the dialogue.

Participants took part in the roundtable in their personal capacities and their views do not necessarily reflect those of organizations they represent. This report does not offer a complete overview of the discussions. It has not been reviewed by the participants and CIG is responsible for its content. The report was prepared by Arber Kuci, CIG’s Program Coordinator in Kosovo.

Interparty consensus on Pristina-Belgrade dialogue

The participants evaluated the process and the results of dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. Understandably, the main topic of the discussion was the agreement on the integrated border management, commonly referred to as IBM. There was a consensus that this agreement—and others reached during the process of “technical talks”—if implemented, would improve the lives of the citizens. The implementation of the first phase of the agreement in two border crossings began the day the roundtable was held.

A participant said that Kosovo Albanian political parties do not necessarily disagree on the need for dialogue, But they disagree about its format and terms. Those who oppose the current dialogue also believe that it is not producing results. That said, there is a consensus for the dialogue with Belgrade, with differences only over what issues and how to address them. This positioning of political parties, according to this speaker, has come about due to the lack of information and transparency on the part of Kosovo’s

government. So far, the government has not explained in what capacities do Kosovo and Serbia take part in the dialogue; is it a process between individuals or between states? The participant also stressed the fact that no debate took place prior to the initiation of this process and, as a result, many within the political spectrum feel ignored or eliminated from the process. The IBM agreement, as this participant stressed, adds more to this haze and makes the whole process even less transparent. He justified those who question the need for such an agreement, noting that Kosovo's borders were recognized by Yugoslavia, the Republic of Serbia, the UNSC Resolution 1244, the Ahtisaari Plan, and Kosovo's Constitution. "What is IBM? Just a crossing point or a border crossing? It is neither, and there is much ambiguity in how it is being interpreted," said this participant, adding that such a process can be anything but genuine for normalizing relations, an overall objective of the dialogue sponsored by the EU. "We need to decrease ambiguity," concluded the participant.

Other participants agreed that talking about a consensus under the current circumstances is somewhat of a stretch. One of them took the discussion a step further, saying that "we should also discuss whether a consensus is needed rather than just whether it is achievable." Judging by how the process has been conducted so far, no unity or common platform is expected to be reached among Kosovo political parties, mostly because no government wants to share with opposition parties the credit from the dialogue. "The dialogue will sustain the current politicians in power," he said.

But governments in Pristina and in Belgrade are facing challenges in managing the process in the eyes of their voters and general publics. In Kosovo, the government has been able to shake the ground beneath what once seemed a firm and steady opposition against the dialogue. The opposition parties are in effect not against the dialogue but against its format. They argue that Kosovo is not represented as an independent state and that it has, so far, made compromises that undermine its sovereignty and provide more benefits for Belgrade than for Pristina. One of the participants agreed that Kosovo has not benefited much from the dialogue and that Pristina continues to rely heavily on the international community. "The past ten years were in favor of Kosovo, now the tide has shifted in favor of Serbia," he said, adding that Serbia might get the date for the EU accession talks "without doing much."

A number of participants believed that the benefits, such as free movement of people and goods and services, from a swift and full implementation of the agreements would absorb the discontent of the opposition parties in Kosovo and Serbia.. A possible repercussion could be the negative reception by Serbs in the north. Participants were optimistic that even in such a scenario, the dialogue would not be damaged or seriously threatened.

Kosovo's government, many participants argued, has been incapable of forming a supportive public opinion for the dialogue. The main argument in favor of the dialogue presented to the public was that it helps Kosovo to get closer to EU membership. If Kosovo engaged in this process, the argument runs, it would get closer to European integration and, in the long term, receive recognition by Belgrade. Other participants argued that these are largely intangible results and the public in Kosovo is aware that

these are long-term goals are to be reached not through the dialogue but by addressing a long list of important issues that negatively affect the functionality of the state.

Another participant said that the dialogue is being used by the government in order to postpone dealing with more important and harder issues, including unemployment, corruption, economic development and electoral theft. But even government's claims that through dialogue Serbia will eventually recognize Kosovo independence are contrary to the real situation. According to this speaker, the removal of the sign "Welcome to Kosovo" in one of the border crossing points as part of the IBM agreement means that this dialogue recognizes Serbia's right not to recognize Kosovo's statehood. Moreover, he argued, the international community is not interested to dismantle Serbia's parallel structures in the north, but rather transform them into legally accepted institutions. This would ensure a certain amount of autonomy for the north, which both Kosovo and Serbia would accept and which would make it possible for Serbia to succeed on its EU integration path. So, in essence, this participant said, this is not a genuine process for the normalization of the relations between two countries. This is also the fault of Kosovo's government which has not been able to discuss with other stakeholders Kosovo's national interests and come up with a platform of its own upon which the dialogue would be based. "We never talk about how can we help Brussels help us," he concluded.

One of the participants said that Kosovo should not engage at all in this dialogue for as long as Serbia does not apologize for the crimes it committed during the war in Kosovo. According to this speaker, Serbia should also return all the stolen properties from Kosovo and ultimately respect Kosovo's statehood. Another participant agreed, saying that the registry books which were stolen during the 1999 war should be returned to Kosovo as an act of good will. "No negotiations should be held about the registry books, they belong to Kosovo," he argued. Another participant took this point one step further, recommending that Serbia removes the mentioning of Kosovo as part of its territory from the preamble of its constitution. Another participant, however, argued that these approaches, however desirable, should take into consideration the involvement of two major international factors, namely the EU and the US. He noted that their contribution to the process should not go unnoticed and that their engagement should by no means be taken for granted.

Rather than addressing this issue through the dialogue, some participants said that the issue of the north is ultimately related to rule of law. Some argued that just like in the rest of Kosovo, the north is prone to continuous criminal activities and criminal networks which should be addressed through coercive instruments. A functioning judiciary was mentioned by most of the participants as the core institution to be revitalized. In relation to the rule of law, one of the participants expressed his skepticism about Kosovo's politicians and leaders. According to him, even if the dialogue was a good process, the individuals who represent Kosovo in it are not to be trusted. "They can be blackmailed because of their deeds," he said.

Conclusions

There was a general agreement that the implementation of the agreements reached so far will show whether the dialogue is a true instrument for eliminating economic and political barriers between Kosovo and Serbia. The IBM agreement has begun to be implemented and, until now, it has been executed in two border crossings. Participants agreed that the agreement makes partition less likely, but it does not exclude other options such as autonomy for the north.

Kosovo's government has been incapable of forming a public opinion in support of the dialogue, although it has managed to sway in its favor some opposition parties, which, up until recently, were staunch opponents of the dialogue. Due to the active involvement of the EU and the US in the process, there is a general agreement among the participants that the dialogue is a fact, and that it is somewhat unrealistic to expect it to stop short of discussing the long overdue issue of the north. Instead of focusing on whether it is necessary or in Kosovo's benefit, the majority of participants suggested, Kosovo should focus on improving the process so that it ultimately brings about tangible and measurable results.

List of Participants

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Dukagjin Gorani, Government of Kosovo

Aubrey Hamilton, Group for Legal and Political Studies

Hydajet Hyseni, Democratic Party of Kosovo

Leon Malazogu, Democracy for Development Institute

Engjellushe Morina, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society

Shkamb Qavdarbasha, Institute for Development Policy

Naim Rashiti, International Crisis Group

Besa Shahini, European Stability Initiative

Nexhmedin Spahiu, TV Mitrovica

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