

Parliamentary Cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia

The Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) organized on December 6, 2014, in Pristina, Kosovo, a roundtable for members of parliaments of Kosovo and Serbia. The objective of the meeting was to contribute to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and between Albanian and Serb societies. The majority of the speakers supported the continuation of the dialogue and also suggested that dialogue and cooperation should be extended to other areas in order to achieve normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

Participants included representatives of Kosovo's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Self-Determination Movement (LVV), Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), and Serbia's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Democratic Party (DS), Social Democratic Party (SDS), and League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV). The roundtable is part of a project on the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Promoting bilateral cooperation

Cooperation between parliamentarians of Kosovo and Serbia takes place through various regional activities and gatherings of international organizations but no substantial form of bilateral cooperation has been established so far. A number of women parliamentarians of Serbia and Kosovo have taken place. Fuelled by the common perspective of European integration, the Balkan countries have been gradually increasing their political and economic cooperation, including cooperation between parliaments. The roundtable participants said that the role of parliaments in improving relations between governments and societies should not be underestimated. They said that the governments in Pristina and Belgrade have the monopoly of institutional communication but argued that the role of parliaments should be strengthened. Some even said that the governments have established almost full control of the parliaments in so many areas that the parliaments must regain their independence.

While it is the executive's responsibility to negotiate agreements, parliamentarians have an important role in oversight by asking questions and in the implementation of the agreements through adopting necessary laws. In this context, cooperation between parliamentarians of Kosovo and Serbia is invaluable given that both are expected to adopt new laws to make the implementation of agreements possible. It would not only begin a new institutional cooperation but also would complement the efforts of the governments

in Pristina and Belgrade in the process of normalization of relations and consolidate the gains achieved so far.

The participants said that bilateral dialogue and cooperation should become a normal occurrence now that some relations have been established between the institutions of Kosovo and Serbia. Some of the participants admitted that they are not pleased with the Brussels dialogue but said that it has no alternative and that the agreements should be implemented. However, some participants from Kosovo stated that the form of the dialogue is disadvantageous to Kosovo and that its institutions should not be part of it anymore. The majority expected the dialogue to continue in the same format as before but were skeptical that the European Union officials will be as involved as before given the new conflicts in Europe and beyond. In this context, they said bilateral cooperation is essential in “moving things faster.”

Despite some reservations, the majority of the speakers supported the dialogue but recommended that it become more transparent, especially in increasing communication between governments and societies. A speaker complained that the citizens find out about the details of the agreements only when the agreements began to be implemented. “And when they believe these agreements are not beneficial to the them, then we deal with resistance.” He suggested that the population should be better prepared for the agreements. The role of public opinion to put pressure on the government to be more transparent on the Brussels dialogue was also highlighted but unfortunately this public pressure was seen as lacking.

The speakers said that the dialogue should also include media, business, sport, and other areas so as to improve relations between the societies in all sectors. “Now the relations between the prime ministers of Kosovo and Serbia are better than the relations between the two societies, and it should be the other way around, but this is because of absence of communication between societies” a speaker said. Another speaker reported that there is already increased cooperation between Serbs and Albanians in these areas and a number of Kosovo cultural events have taken place in Serbia and many Serbian artists take part in events in Kosovo.

In addition to the Brussels dialogue, some Kosovo speakers said that there should be an internal dialogue between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. This dialogue is important in improving relations between the two societies. “This is especially important for the Serb community, as a smaller community,” a speaker noted, adding that there is much more emphasis on improving governmental relations than social relations.

Regarding the role of parliaments in the dialogue, the speakers complained that they were sidelined in the dialogue process. Kosovo’s prime minister reported a few times in the parliament, but some said the detailed information was withheld. In the Serbian parliament even formal reporting did not happen. “I cannot support something that I have no information about,” a speaker said.

The speakers said that they should become more active in offering advice and ideas, supervising and monitoring the government and the implementation of the agreement, and asking for more detailed information on the dialogue process. The idea of each parliament setting up committees to follow up on various issues of the agreement was mentioned. A speaker said that they should undertake some joint initiatives, as “in difficult times it is easier to resolve problems together.” The speaker also said that the societies often expect too much from the politicians and when their expectations are not met, they feel disappointed. “This is one more reason why we need to be in constant communication with our voters to explain to them the challenges of resolving their problems.” One speaker mentioned that the quality of democracy in both parliaments was still lacking, MPs should monitor and criticize even their own parties in government. Party politics was mentioned as hindering the quality of the oversight role of the parliament.

Some of the areas in which parliaments could promote cooperation are education, healthcare, and missing persons. Education and healthcare are particularly important and challenging. Many suggested that a resolution to recognizing the diplomas of the university in Mitrovica should be found. Mutual recognition of diplomas by Serbia and Kosovo should also happen in the short term. A Kosovo speaker said that it is obvious that the participants have good intentions to improve relations but that “good intentions are not sufficient. We should become more active and focus in development issues.”

The dialogue so far has given results in freedom of movement of people and goods and has eased some cooperation in areas of culture, media, and has made possible visits of senior Kosovo officials in Belgrade. Elections in the north were also considered a success but the formation of the municipalities is lagging.

A speaker said that the parliaments should create a mechanism to supervise the dialogue in Brussels. Although one speaker supported the idea of having a common monitoring mechanism between the two parliaments, most thought it to be impossible at this stage. However, meetings such as this one should continue and provide for exchange of information in this regard. The need for a third party to convene and mediate these meetings was still necessary as the degree of the trust is still not high. The majority of participants supported another meeting in Belgrade in the first part of 2015. Topics for such meeting would be missing persons, exchange of experience on supervising the executive in each country. Some speakers suggested that experts be invited according to the topics discussed. They also agreed to each ask their executives for an update of the situation regarding the issue of missing persons.

Conclusion

The participants concluded that parliamentary cooperation would not only contribute to development and implementation of policy but also improve the overall relations between Serbs and Albanians. Some easing of tensions between societies has its roots in informal gatherings on parliamentary level. While government representatives often have to follow certain restrictions and are at the center of attention, parliamentarians can speak out on

difficult issues more frankly and thus be an important channel of communication for resolving disputes.

They recommended more immediate cooperation in less controversial areas such as missing persons, education, environment, health, media, and culture, and suggested that cooperation in areas of security, organized crime, unemployment and economic development should be established soon and it would benefit both societies equally. They also said that the liaison officers in Belgrade and Pristina could become more active in facilitating cooperation in non-political areas. Some participants said that parliamentarians could contribute also to the formation of the Association.

An internal dialogue between Kosovo's government and Kosovo Serbs and between the two societies in general was considered essential in creating the preconditions for normalization or relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Such an environment would be especially important for the returnees.

The objective of the CIG project is that institutional cooperation between Pristina and Belgrade is transformed from a 'historic' to a 'business as usual.'

Participants

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Iilir Deda, Member of the Parliament of Kosovo, Self-Determination Movement
Sadri Ferati, Member of the Parliament of Kosovo, Democratic League of Kosovo
Donika Kada-Bujupi, Member of the Parliament of Kosovo, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo
Margarita Kadriu, Member of the Parliament of Kosovo, Democratic Party of Kosovo
Vladeta Kostic, Member of the Parliament of Serbia, Serbian Progressive Party
Alma Lama, Member of the Parliament of Kosovo, Democratic League of Kosovo
Nada Lazic, Member of the Parliament of Serbia, League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina
Petar Miletic, Former Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Kosovo
Dardan Molliqaj, Secretary, Self-Determination Movement
Slobodan Petrovic, Member of the Parliament of Kosovo, Srpska List
Dejan Radenkovic, Member of the Parliament of Serbia, Socialist Party of Serbia
Janko Veselinovic, Member of the Parliament of Serbia, Social Democratic Party
Vanja Vukic, Member of the Parliament of Serbia, Socialist Party of Serbia
Shpetim Gashi, Vice President, Council for Inclusive Governance
Alex Roinishvili Grigorev, President, Council for Inclusive Governance
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