

## Advancing Normalization

The Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) reconvened a group of Serbian and Kosovo analysts for another workshop on October 11-12, 2019 in Nis, Serbia. The analysts discussed the prospects for normalization in the absence of dialogue, the roadmap to concluding normalization, and modified the Vrdnik recommendations of 2019. Analysts focused on the prospects for dialogue between the new government of Kosovo likely consisting of the Self-Determination Movement (VV) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Serbian government and how a process led by Aleksandar Vucic and Albin Kurti would look like. The analysts concluded that the dialogue would resume soon but that a solution would not be found quickly. Certainly not in the next few months, as suggested by the U.S. ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell.

The workshop is part of a CIG initiative that includes analysts, observers, politicians, and policy developers that examine and evaluate the Kosovo-Serbia relations and offer input to develop the ingredient for a final settlement. The initiative is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. This workshop was also supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

### Dialogue dynamics following political changes in Kosovo

Participants said that the October 6 results of the elections represent a tectonic shift for the political scene in Kosovo, and that it would bring an important new dynamics for the dialogue. They outlined that this represents a shift of generations, the fall of the war elite and the end of the post-war transition in Kosovo. They also concluded that the international community is adjusting to the changes.

- The analysts said that if VV's Albin Kurti indeed forms a new government, he will face a number of challenges, but outlined that it would be very difficult for the international community to condition Kurti on the dialogue and the agreement, as he does not depend on the West for his electoral victory. He won elections without international support. Analysts argued that Kurti should be given a chance to show what he can do. At the same time, they stressed that it is a good thing that LDK would most likely be an equal partner in the government as it would play a check and balance role.
- Regarding Kurti's call for a dialogue with "authentic" Serbs, some of the analysts stressed that it is not up to VV or LDK to tell the Serb voters who is authentic and who is not. The analysts agreed that Kurti should implement his idea of a dialogue with "authentic" Serbs, but at the same time he should pursue a dialogue with the Serb List, a party that won all 10 Serb reserved seats in the Kosovo parliament.
- Kurti will focus first on the establishing the rule of law and fighting organized crime in Kosovo. This is important not only for Kosovo but also for the rest of the region as the crime

networks in the Balkans are interconnected and eventual investigations in Kosovo could bring about investigations in the rest of the region.

- The announced reciprocity could be either a series of symbolic steps, such as car and travel documents, which would not be a real obstacle for resuming the dialogue, or a full political and economic reciprocity that would bring any communication between Pristina and Belgrade to a halt. The analysts said that both sides should be flexible in their conditions for resuming the dialogue.
- Some participants drew parallels between Serbia's 2012 when Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won and Kosovo's 2019 when VV won. Aiming to weaken internal opposition to the dialogue and the implementation of agreements, the international community supported SNS. For the same reason, it could support VV now with the hope that it would support the dialogue with Serbia. Some others drew a parallel between first post-Milosevic Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic and Albin Kurti. Both Djindjic and Kurti proposed a wide scope of reforms regarding the rule of law that could endanger the structures of the 'deep state.' The analysts expect huge resistance by the 'deep state' structures to Kurti's proposed measures to cut the privileged access of oligarchs to national recourses and eliminate monopolies.

## **Resuming the dialogue**

Participants outlined a number of conclusions and recommendations regarding the resumption of the dialogue and commented on the latest initiatives coming from the West. They criticized the way the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue has been run so far. They said that social normalization could continue without the dialogue, but the normalization between the state institutions is difficult to happen without an internationally sponsored dialogue.

- The analysts welcomed Kurti's proposal that the new government would first assess the signed agreements and their implementation, and analyze various models of negotiations. Some of them said that there are clear benefits of the dialogue which should be recognized by the new government, as Serbs in Kosovo now regularly take part in the elections, and furthermore, they vote with Kosovo documents.
- The analysts said that there should be no rush to reach an agreement. Many of the former initiatives of the international representatives failed because of a haste to resolve the issue "during their mandate." From that perspective, some of them pointed out that it is naïve to think that the Grenell process will succeed, as it has little substance so far. Using economic incentives to encourage the sides for an agreement is not enough and of little value for the leaders.
- The US and Germany have to establish consensus on the most important issues. Perhaps Berlin is waiting for a new U.S. administration to be formed in January 2021.
- Vucic will not actively and productively engage in the process during the upcoming pre-election campaign in Serbia. Polls show Serbs are in favor of a frozen conflict, and they would only support a border change that also includes North Mitrovica.
- Some of the analysts stressed the need for Serbia to recognize the existence of Kosovo, if not the independence, as that would allow having a more normal dialogue, and give incentives to the new Kosovo government to engage more actively.
- The EU integration perspective is a key incentive and it is difficult to see that Kosovo and Serbia can reach an agreement without it.

- The analysts stressed that the West should not push Kurti to engage in the process immediately. The new Kosovo government should be given space and time to first address some rule of law issues promised in the campaign.
- While the international community is working to renew the dialogue, the implementation of all previous agreements has to be completed in the same time. A complete implementation is a prerequisite for a successful future process. Some should be implemented first, such as the IBM agreement, as well the agreements on the diplomas and energy, while the fund for the north should start functioning. This would renew belief in normalization on the ground.

## **Participants**

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