

Serbia's proposals regarding Kosovo's political system

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On 13 January the Serbian parliament accepted the document prepared on the initiative of President Tomislav Nikolic, *Platform for Kosovo*, which is intended to be a negotiating mandate in Serbia's talks with Pristina. In this document the Serbian government has laid out the maximum scope of its "realistic" expectations while also maintaining its position of not recognising the independence of its former province. Serbia's demands include the administrative division of Kosovo into regions where one of them, having wide autonomy, would be composed of Serbian communes. In exchange for this, Belgrade is offering to dismantle Serbia's administrative structures in northern Kosovo which have so far prevented Pristina from exercising its power in this territory. At the same time Prime Minister Ivica Dacic hinted at the possibility of withdrawing the Serbian objection against Kosovo entering the UN. This was severely criticised in Belgrade by both the opposition and the coalition partners.

Another round of talks between Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and his Kosovar counterpart Hashim Thaci scheduled for 17 January will be held in a climate of mounting tension in Kosovo, where incidents were seen over the Christmas period (disruption of the celebrations in Gračanica, destruction of Serbian tombstones in Kosovo Polje). Then, in southern Serbia, at the border with Kosovo (the Presevo Valley inhabited by Albanians), the monument to the late Albanian separatists is an issue which provokes intense feelings and the Serbian government wishes to remove it. Furthermore, politicians in both Kosovo and Albania are increasingly often mentioning the need to grant autonomy to this region.

Commentary

- By offering to withdraw its administrative structures from northern Kosovo and abandoning the issue of Kosovo's international status, Serbia is demonstrating its conciliatory approach. The EU has made progress in the accession process conditional on the normalisation of relations with Kosovo. Serbia hopes that the date of the launch of accession negotiations will be determined at the EU summit in June.
- Politicians, the media and society in Kosovo have responded unfavourably to the Serbian proposals. Should they be accepted, this will trigger accusations of Prime Minister Hashim Thaci betraying national interests. On the other hand, rejection of these proposals at the very beginning would shift the responsibility for Serbian-Kosovar

dialogue to Pristina and would further complicate its relations with the EU. It is possible that in the northern part of the country inhabited by Serbs, discontent will grow either when Serbs make further-reaching concessions, when Kosovo toughens its position or should provocations from circles sabotaging dialogue between the two countries occur.

- Politicians in Kosovo are ever more frequently raising the question of the rights of the Albanian minority in the Presevo Valley and they link the case of status of northern Kosovo with the demand of granting autonomy to the communes in southern Serbia, which is inhabited by Albanians. The Albanian prime minister also expressed his interest in issues concerning Albanians in Serbia. Serbia will most likely reject talks with Kosovo on this, considering it an internal question and will not agree to a dangerous precedent being set. Granting autonomy to the Albanian communes would lead to similar demands concerning Bosniaks in Sandzak and other national minorities.

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