

Kosovo – Serbia: normalisation of relations or just diplomatic theatre? An analysis of the April 2013 EU brokered agreement between Kosovo and Serbia

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Kosovo and Serbia's Prime Ministers reached an agreement for the normalization of relations on 19 April 2013 in Brussels. This agreement, brokered by the European Union (EU), is certainly a very important agreement with regards to the relations of Kosovo and Serbia, provided it will, ever, be implemented. This agreement looks to arrange a power-sharing mechanism in the north of Kosovo that would be acceptable to both Prishtina and Belgrade authorities. Finally, this agreement aims to bring a normalization that would lead to reconciliation and a resolution of the Albanian – Serbian issue.

The EU integration aspiration of both the countries made it possible for the agreement to be reached. This agreement, indeed, strengthens the path to the EU integration process for both Kosovo and Serbia. However, given the enlargement fatigue mood and the complications that the process will encounter the risks of halting the reforms (throughout the Balkans) are formidable and may increase.

This paper analyses the relations of Kosovo and Serbia in the light of the current agreement and the implications towards the EU integration process. The paper argues that while the agreement is very important it may not necessarily be historic as has been enthusiastically reported and commented upon. The paper argues that the EU is still the main actor holding the key to implementation of the agreement and that while Kosovo and Serbia are the actors to implement the agreement the signs for obstructing the implementation are still very strong.

INTRODUCTION

Following months of negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo officials, at the level of Prime Ministers, an agreement to normalise the relations has been reached through the mediation of the European Union. This agreement is meant to strengthen both Serbia and Kosovo paths towards integration within the EU. More importantly it is envisaged to open a process of development, reconciliation and cooperation between both Kosovo Albanians and Serbian communities in Kosovo and the Balkans, in general. The great interest of both countries to progress on their path to the EU integration process led to such an agreement and commitment. An agreement based on their common evaluation that a historic necessity needed to start a process of dialogue and cooperation that would lead to a more open and honest bilateral relations would have been ideal. However, having in mind the political developments between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs since the end of the 19th century and especially over the last two decades, such an initiative would not seem to have been possible. As Serwer (2013, *Peacefare*, 22 April 2013) has noted this dialogue is merely an 'elite pact-making' rather than a peace-building process with both communities, in Kosovo and Serbia, still thinking ill about each other and viewing themselves as victims.

The conflict between Kosovo Albanians and Serb authorities is not a conflict of the last two decades, as it is often viewed as being by different outside observers. It is as old as the first signs of the break up of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of nation states and nationalism in the Balkans. As Mertus (1999: 5, cited in Guzina 2003: 31) notes, often outside observers are caught in between two truths on Kosovo, the Serbian and Albanian one and usually circle around three lines of rhetoric; namely of the complexity, denial and Balkan primordialism. Local historic narratives indeed differ quite drastically that causes confusion to the outside observer and, perhaps, is indicative of the complexity of the conflict. As also discussed by Poulton and Vickers (1997: 139-44 cited in Guzina, 2003: 33) both narratives tend to be so extreme as to not leave any space for one another; basically meaning that Kosovo can either be Serb or Albanian but not both.

The April agreement is a step forward to building up a better relations framework between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in the Balkans. Whether this

agreement is historic or not, as viewed by many observers, it is hard to predict and only time will show. The history of the last two decades suggests that many agreements in the Balkans and especially those involving Serbia do not have a great record of implementation, but quite the contrary.

This paper analyses the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia in the perspective of the recent agreement brokered by the EU. The analysis examines the relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in historical perspective, to build a discussion about the importance of such an agreement from the perspective of integration between these two communities in Kosovo and the reconciliation and cooperation between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in the Balkans. Lastly, the paper explores the challenges of the implementation of the agreement along with the EU role in the process and the positions of Kosovo and Serbia in this respect and examines how such normalisation builds the ways forward for Kosovo and Serbia in their progress towards EU integration. This analysis is not supplemented by a particular theoretical approach.

WHAT IS THERE TO NORMALISE?

The mistrust that exists between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo is not something that is developed as a consequence of the political tensions and the conflict in 1990s. Particular historical narratives that were chosen to spark and develop nationalism and the sense of belonging (in the period of the creation of nation states and nationalism in the Balkans) triggered a conflicting attitude from both communities to claim their presence and their ownership rights to Kosovo. Development of such nationalism required a process of seeking to document the presence of these nations through time. The common element of both parts of the historical narrative has been the 'suffering' of one ethnicity caused by the other. Both narratives developed the victimisation element as the main factor to drive their struggles. While these narratives have been pretty straight forward in the direction of Serbs causing horror against Albanians and vice-versa some careful outside observers (excluding those influenced by only one narrative) tend to find periods of harmony and cooperation between these two communities for centuries. Mertus (1999: 5-9) observes that Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo have lived in harmony and have also shared mutual respect about their rights and cultures for centuries; even

waging war together against foreign powers. She, (*ibid.*) suggests also that the chances for such cooperation to continue exist despite the difficulties such a process would face in the aftermath of the late conflict.

The gap between two communities and the friction between their relations was deepened further in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Albanians in the SFRY were never recognised as a nation despite them being more in number than many other communities who enjoyed this privilege and therefore particular political status within the SFRY. Kosovo and Vojvodina, as provinces of Serbia, were denied the republic status because the republics were entities of *nations* as opposed to *nationalities* (terminology coming from the Soviet Union doctrine). The nation (in Serbian *narod*) could form a republic in a federation and therefore have the right to secession, the while a nationality (in Serbian *narodnost*) could not have the right to secession as a state of the same nation already existed, like Albania and Hungary. The practical answer to this is for political reasons that a Kosovo Republic could secede from Yugoslavia and join Albania. Zoran Pajic (1995) describes this situation as two created categories in the SFRY, the hosts and historical guests. The hosts (nations) are Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, Montenegrins and Macedonians while the historical guests, 'national minorities', are all other ethnic groups living in the SFRY (Pajic, 1995: 162).

Different Serbian regimes since the end of the World War II (WWII) employed different oppressive techniques against the Albanian population in Kosovo denying political, cultural and often civil rights. Such rights however, would be upgraded during different political developments in the SFRY to culminate with the constitutional changes where Kosovo and Vojvodina were granted autonomous status and were recognised as federative units in the SFRY. That meant having all the rights of the republic including their constitutions but the legal name and therefore the denial of secession. This development was viewed in Serbia as an anti-Serbian enterprise, which triggered the construction of a particular anti-Albanian rhetoric firstly, to be developed to include an anti-Croat, anti-Slovenian and anti-Bosnian rhetoric. To recap all those details and developments since after WWII the main reason for such systematic construction of an anti-Albanian sentiment seems to have been the failure of different Serbian regimes to change the demographics in Kosovo. The failure to increase the number of Serbs that would settle and live in Kosovo (despite the incentives of free land that would incorporate the confiscation of lands

from Albanians to be given to Serbs) triggered such narratives not only from Serbian officials but also from intellectual circles affiliated to the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and some religious leaders and officials. Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Serbian Church played a crucial role in the construction of the nationalism and the creation of a Serbian hegemonic sentiment against almost all nations in the SFRY that culminated in the wars that followed the break-up of the SFRY. The main justification for such sentiments would be the 'sufferings' of Serbs, and in relation to Kosovo, Serbian claims of Albanian systematic terror.

A particular Serbian discourse of forced migration of Serbs from Kosovo due to alleged Albanian oppression developed. Claims of thousands of Serbs leaving Kosovo from late 1960s to mid 1980s, due to Albanian pressure were quite common (Nikolic, 2003: 63). Such claims dismissed the economic factor for such migration and/or claimed it as a predominantly Albanian discourse. A migration of Serbs from and to Kosovo was common during Serbian regimes depending on the presence or absence of financial incentives from authorities. Hivzi Islami (1994: 30-5), an Albanian demographer, offers some figures about the population in Kosovo and the migration of the Serb population during different times in Kosovo, along with some economic statistics that, compared with the rest of the SFRY, reflect the lowest economic development that existed in Kosovo. Horvat (1988: 109) notes, however, that the migration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo was caused because of the poor economic and social conditions and was also part of the Yugoslav trend of many ethnicities migrating to their kin republics as a result of the ethnification of the Yugoslav political system. Further to this discourse leading Serbian national figures tried to portray the Kosovo Albanian's birth rate as an anti-Serbian plot that was designed to create the province as a pure Albanian enclave (Guzina 2003: 35). The Serbian migration from Kosovo were branded with terms 'pogrom' and 'genocide' and the Albanian population was presented as 'wild', 'separatists and terrorists', 'rapist of Serbian women', 'enemies of all colours' and similar terminology (Guzina, *ibid.*). The Independent Commission Report, compiled by intellectuals from all parts of the SFRY, including Kosovo, in 1990, reported that these Serbian claims were made without any evidence (Guzina, 2003: 35-6). Such anti-Albanian rhetoric by the Serbian nationalist intellectuals and media served to justify the domination over Kosovo that culminated with the annulment of the autonomy that Kosovo had enjoyed since 1974 constitutional changes in the SFRY.

Relations after 1989

Another chapter in the relations between Albanians and Serbs was opened. The Serbian Assembly passed a special law on 'labour relations' in Kosovo, which made possible the expulsion of more than 80 000 Albanians from their jobs in factories and other enterprises. Attempts were also made to colonise the province and special privileges were granted to Serbs who settled to Kosovo, including loans and free land. Legislation was also passed which made it illegal for Kosovar Albanians to buy or lease property from Serbs (Independent International Commission on Kosovo IICK, *Kosovo Report*, 2000). Human rights abuses throughout the 1990s were continuous, systematic and institutionalised. They included: torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, violation of the right to a fair trial, intimidation and harassment, denial of access to health care and education and in 1998 when the war started other violations were added to the list. The wartime violations included: the right to life, rape and other forms of sexual harassment, missing persons, deliberate destruction of civilian property, looting and pillage, human shields and other endangerment of non-combatants during military operations and forced expulsion (OSCE, 1999). These records are not very encouraging for future relations between the two nations.

The victimisation element from Serbian side was used as the means to justify its actions in Kosovo while from the Albanians side it was used to justify the need to end the Serbian rule over Kosovo. The trend though changed after the Kosovo war. As Bieber notes (2002: 105) the official discourse emphasised the victimisation of the Serbs from neighbouring countries, from International Community (IC) and from the Milosevic regime itself, which led to a situation of denial of any crimes committed by Serbs in the Yugoslav space. For Albanians in Kosovo the victimisation element was also some sort of silent approval from the general population for the revenge attacks against those few Serbs that remained in Kosovo after the war in 1999.

The relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo were developed in a constantly conflicting environment since Kosovo was occupied and annexed by Serbia in 1912 (according to the Albanian narrative) or liberated from Turks (according to Serbian narrative). Indeed the historical narrative that is fabricated in the sense of exclusion and denial of the significance of any cooperative

fragment of history for political reasons has shown to only deepen the differences between the communities.

There is a lot to normalise and such normalisation should have a starting point. The differences, mistrust and hate between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo is a serious matter. The chances that they would come to reason and sit down and try honestly to normalise their relationships by revisiting their historical narratives (as there each side usually tends to find the justification for their claims over the territory), their interest to ensure better lives for their peoples and acknowledge their own crimes and sincerely look forward to peace and cooperation would look as a fairy tale or a science fiction story to those who are experienced with the region. The history, however, has shown that such enterprise is possible, especially in a prosperous economic environment, providing the political differences are settled. The only possible prosperous economic environment and democratic order for the Balkans remains the EU, despite its financial difficulties. The relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs need to be addressed in the perspective of acknowledgment of their key events in both histories, avoiding the instrumentalisation of those events as evidence for one side over the other (Guzina, 2003: 31).

The recent agreement, (and based on the title itself “First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations”) and the others to come, is certainly another brick in the bridge building process between Serbia and Kosovo. In this perspective the normalisation of the relations requires more than just a formal agreement between the parties. Although such an agreement is, with no doubt, a good starting point. The importance of this agreement lies in the fact that it is indicative that both parties have come to terms to understand clearly their positions and their potential to deal with those positions.

IMPORTANCE OF THE AGREEMENT

This agreement is not a peace agreement that agrees to a compromise for a final political solution between parties. In the same way as the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 did not address the core of the problem but only ended the conflict in 1999 and basically was a ceasefire and not a peace agreement, as put by Yannis (2009: 162-3). This agreement does not address the issues of what is the political map of both Serbia and Kosovo and how their progresses towards EU integration are

to be defined in such situation. For five EU members Serbia's map includes Kosovo inside of it while for the other twenty-three it does not. The agreement merely delays and leaves this issue to be defined with time (that may very well again complicate matters, by returning to the same point) and looks to arrange a power-sharing mechanism in the north of Kosovo that would be acceptable to both Prishtina and Belgrade authorities.

The fact itself that an agreement has been reached is an important step towards different relations between Kosovo and Serbia. As doubtfully as such normalisation can be seen because this agreement has been reached under pressure and because of the progress of the agendas of both countries towards their EU integration, still the EU integration has served as the main leverage to push this process forward. Such situation may raise questions about the seriousness of both parties to work closely on their normalisation of relations, if their interest in integration fades away. On the other hand, no concessions have been reached in the Balkans without pressure from the third party. This is something that external actors and agencies, which were involved in crisis management to end the conflict in the Balkans, are quite familiar with. How these relations are going to be defined or modified in the future depends on the EU's commitment to remain engaged in the region and keep the enlargement perspective as open as possible for the Western Balkans.

The leaders of both countries have displayed maturity and constructive approach in this agreement and some sort of acknowledgement of their positions created especially after the independence declaration of Kosovo back in 2008. Belgrade seems to have understood that its political objective to return Kosovo to its jurisdiction and sovereignty is simply over and an impossible mission. Prishtina seems to have understood that Belgrade can become a real problem and pain with regards to Kosovo's international recognition and independence consolidation. Prishtina seems to have also understood that the signs of Kosovo state in the north of Kosovo, along with its integration to Kosovo legal system, can be extended only by violent means (something that Prishtina seems to have also understood that requires better planning and the risks that such approach may lead to more complicated political problems are very high) or by a dialogue that would ensure their presence there, albeit on a step-by-step approach. Both Prime Ministers this time also seemed to have been more careful in their statements to international media, refraining from

their usual use of triumphalist vocabulary. This may be another indication that they are prepared to face their realities in more constructive ways. Political elites in both Serbia and Kosovo (excluding those with more extreme nationalist programs) seem to have understood that there is a time that they should be more flexible with regards to their final political positions and that an antagonistic situation only creates a limbo in which it will be very difficult to prevent EU integration inertia. The political elite in Serbia seems to understand that the using of the UN card to restore its sovereignty through Resolution 1244 is not only legally difficult (and perhaps impossible) but also geopolitically. The political elite in Kosovo also seems to have understood that a place in the UN is not as easy objective as it may have appeared earlier due to great possibilities of Russia, the UN Security Council member that did not agree with the final political status of independence for Kosovo. A place for Kosovo in the UN seems to have also been an important part of negotiations between the Prime Ministers and that has been reflected in the 14th point of their agreement, where the parties *'agree that neither side will block, or encourage others to block, the other side's progress in the respective EU path'* (Gazeta Express, Agreement, 19 April 2013). Notably, the issue of UN membership was omitted. It is quite understandable for Serbia to insist on taking out the UN from this point of the agreement due to its geopolitical strategies. By keeping the UN cards open Serbia can create more obstacles for Kosovo's efforts to consolidate itself in the international community and in this way look forward to more concessions from the EU. It is quite hard, though, to understand Kosovo's willingness to compromise on this point and not insist on a provision, or at least a modality, that would lead to easing Kosovo's way to UN membership.

The importance of the agreement lies in the fact that these are the first positive signs that both parties agree to look forward to easing the enmities. Up to now all the agreements that were done in relation to the Kosovo – Serbia conflict were done with only one of the parties and the international community. This is the first agreement between the two states and it is the first sign that Serbia can (and needs to) deal with Kosovo on equal terms (Prelec, ICG, 7 May 2013) in the sense of recognising it as a particular entity. Although Serbia insists that this is not an implicit (or explicit) recognition of Kosovo's independence it recognises it as a different entity, especially viewing it in the perspective of the 14th point of the Agreement, which is the only point with a bilateral character. Without any ambition to predict what the future might hold

with regards to a formal recognition or not from Serbia this agreement has created the possibilities for Serbia to do so, or in another scenario, to refrain from any opposition with regards to Kosovo's consolidation in international institutions until a formal recognition would not be a domestic suicide for any politician or political group in Serbia. As Yannis (2009: 167) noted "the only chance for such a bravery had been assassinated in March 2003, when the then Serb Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was shot dead ...".

This agreement is not only important for Kosovo and Serbia but for the EU itself because the EU is the first international actor to facilitate the first agreement between the parties on the highest political level. However, the USA's backstage involvement deserves credit, especially for driving Kosovo towards a compromise. For the EU this is a success story, the only success story for quite some time now, in the international perspective. This agreement enforced and empowered a 'European solution', which provides a common language and a wider perspective to address an impossible situation created from a zero-sum conflict in Kosovo (Yannis, 2009: 163-4). The importance of the agreement also lies in the creation of particular understandings of the parties and the potential that it may have to clear the EU integration perspective for the whole Balkans, especially Bosnia as argued by Lehne (2013, Carnegie Europe, 23 April 2013).

Public opinions with regards to EU integration are quite different in Kosovo and Serbia. In Kosovo the vast majority of the population supports integration while in Serbia Euro-scepticism is high and rising. The rise of scepticism towards the EU has been quite normal for many countries that went through the integration process as the process often was seen as an endless one. However, once the country neared the accession the support for integration increased. Similar developments could be expected in Serbia once the country sees itself nearing the accession. The Euro-scepticism in Kosovo can be expected to rise and then fall again depending on the stage through which Kosovo passes.

The EU integration process surely was the main impetus to push the parties towards the agreement. However, the economic assistance that follows such progress was the main reason to bring the parties to the table. Serbia was keener to look forward towards such assistance than Kosovo due to its dire financial crisis. This is not to suggest that Kosovo stands better than Serbia on its economic performance but Serbia's access to such funds is more visible while for Kosovo such funds still

remain a faraway reach. The April agreement opened the way for Kosovo to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and therefore to start its way towards the progress of the integration. However, the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) is losing traction (Lehne, 2013, Carnegie Europe, 23 April 2013) as many countries feel that the objective of accession is very far away. After Croatia's accession in July 2013, very few within the EU institutions believe that the next enlargement will happen before 2020. The financial and debt crisis that the EU has been facing over recent years is causing the enlargement process to lose support in the general EU publics and also creating a lack of communication between some EU governments to convince their respective publics of the importance of further enlargement.

For the Balkans enlargement delay is a major issue as any reform or will to continue with political agreements, which look forward to political stability, may be at direct risk. The April agreement is also another indication that the EU is committed to work closely with the Western Balkans and construct a future as per the Thessaloniki Declaration of June 2003, which clearly stated that the 'future of the Balkans is within the European Union' (2003, para. 2). It remains to be seen for how long the EU can hold the spirit of the Thessaloniki Declaration alive in the Balkans considering the limited EU willingness for further enlargement any time soon.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The implementation of any agreement relies on the constant interest of the parties to go along with it. The implementation of agreements in the Balkans has shown that it is not an easy task. Serbia's record on implementation of agreements has not been very encouraging during the last two decades. The main interest of the parties to work on the implementation of the agreement remains their EU integration process.

The agreement foresaw the establishment of an implementation committee by the two sides with the facilitation of the EU, as stipulated on its last (15th) point. In May 2013 the two Prime Ministers agreed on an Implementation Plan that foresaw in details how the implementation committee would oversee the process in different areas from legal framework adjustments; creation of a management team for the establishment of Association/Community; and integration of the Serbian Security

personnel and other issues to the organisation of the municipal elections (Rettman, EU Observer, 30 May 2013). It is not clear how many laws will have to be changed in Kosovo to enable legal coherence with the implementation of the agreement. It is claimed by a legal official of the Government of Kosovo that it may well be from 40 to 50 laws that will require amendments (KIPRED, 2013: 10). The Kosovo Parliament ratified the Agreement as an international agreement, which puts the government into a favourable position to ensure a smooth implementation process. According to the Kosovo Constitution (Article 19, para. 2) international agreements have superiority over the Constitution and the laws of Kosovo. The ratification of the agreement as an international one disables any legal initiative against the implementation of legal provisions that derive from the Agreement (KIPRED, 2003: 11). With regards to the Serbian side it is still not clear to how the legal adjustments will be shaped and if it will incorporate any constitutional changes. Officials in Belgrade have indicated that Serbia will enact a “Law on substantial autonomy for Kosovo and Metohija” that will include provisions for Community of Serb Municipalities at a later stage (*ibid.*). Legal adjustments in Serbia will depend on the level of pressure that the EU will apply in order to ensure a coherent legal framework that will incorporate the Association (or Communities as per Serbian version) within Kosovo legal system.

The implementation of this agreement will have its challenges both in Kosovo and Serbia while the internal opposition still remains strong in both countries. Despite the public opposition to the agreement still a smooth implementation process depends on the behaviours and the willingness of both governments to seriously tackle the implementation plan that both parties agreed under the facilitation of the EU. Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) conducted a poll in May 2013 on how Kosovars felt about the Thaci – Dacic Agreement. The poll found that Kosovo Albanians were divided with 43% in favour of the agreement, 38% opposed it and 19% did not have an answer (KSCC, 2013: 11). Kosovo Serbs in Northern Kosovo predominantly opposed it while Kosovo Serbs living in other areas of Kosovo were predominantly supportive of the agreement (*ibid.*). Further the poll found that 21% of Kosovars thought the agreement was to Kosovo’s advantage; 30% thought Serbia would profit while 37% saw both countries profiting from it while the rest did not have an opinion (*ibid.*). This is an illustration of mixed feelings and doubt about the agreement in general in Kosovo from both communities. Observing the claims of the political opposition in Kosovo, the claims of Serb leaders in the north and the claims

of some political parties in the opposition in Serbia the agreement is very inconvenient. Serbs in the north of Kosovo feel that the agreement may obstruct their way of life and that their ties with Serbia will be cut off with the expansion of the Kosovo authority. Albanians on the other hand feel that this agreement was nothing but a permission for Serbia to create another state within Kosovo territory, similar to a Serb republic in Bosnia, while making Kosovo pay for a first class ticket to the EU for Serbia.

Whatever the feelings that exist in Kosovo for the agreement the capacity and the potential of the 'spoilers' (Albanian political opposition and Serb leaders in the north) to obstruct or stop the implementation process is limited to particular protests and demonstrations on the streets. Protests can be successful only if the institutions in Prishtina or Belgrade support them. Vetëvendosja (Self-Determination) Movement (VV), the most vocal opponents of the agreement, and the dialogue with Serbia in general under the conditions, to which the Government of Kosovo agreed, does have a great support, especially from the young age constituents. However, such support does not seem to be enough to stop the implementation of the agreement especially while other political groups from the opposition do not necessarily view this agreement in VV terms. Other opposition political parties have expressed their support of the agreement that was reflected in their vote to ratify the agreement in the Parliament thus leaving the VV to stand alone in its effort to oppose the agreement. Serbs in the north, on the other hand, seem to have found themselves on a particular paradox with regards to the possibility of opposing the agreement. There is a sense of confusion about which they oppose at this stage, the Government of Serbia or the Government of Kosovo. They are experienced in organising resistance of any form including occasional battles against Prishtina but they do not know how to fight Belgrade (Prelec, ICG, 7 May 2013). Their options seem limited to three directions. Firstly, to not oppose it but fully embrace the agreement and assist in implementation, which in mid and long term would be very favourable for the advancement of their autonomy. Secondly, oppose it and declare independence and aim for a better deal with one or both states that claims it from. Thirdly, it can go on its own and obstruct the agreement wherever possible (*ibid.*) and either face isolation or drag Belgrade to support them on a re-negotiation of the agreement. All these options do not really seem to be very convenient and if Belgrade expresses its honest commitment to implement the agreement (something that completely

depends on the EU pressures) then the obstruction of the Serbs from the north will be seriously challenged and limited.

CONCLUSION

This agreement is historic only because it is the first to be reached on this level. It is not historic because the conflict in Kosovo is not ethnic. Both communities can live side by side each other for they have been doing so since the 6th and 7th centuries. It is political. Only one point of the agreement is of the political nature (therefore on normalisation) while all 14 other points are merely arrangements over the governance of an area in Kosovo. This agreement challenges the principles of multiethnic Kosovo that have been promoted and fostered by the International Community despite the fact that this concept did not make any sense in the Kosovo environment (above 90% of population is Albanian). Multiculturalism concepts would have made more sense. This agreement may lead to other agreements that may be historic providing they will tackle the core of the conflict in Kosovo – the political one.

The agreement moved both Kosovo and Serbia from their extreme positions and opened their path towards the EU integration. Serbia recognised Prishtina institutions as political entities representing another political entity while refraining from recognising its sovereignty. Kosovo on the other hand recognised Serbs in north Kosovo as a particular entity offering them a level of political autonomy. An autonomy that may be expected to be advanced more as both Kosovo and Serbia move towards their EU integration process. Serbia seems to have changed its attitude towards Kosovo when it always boycotted any regional meeting where the Kosovo officials participated. This especially after the Serbia pressured the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) not to invite the Kosovo President to the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Summit that was scheduled to be held in Ohrid – FYROM on 1 June 2013 under the chairmanship of FYROM. The organisers were forced to cancel the summit after Albania, Croatia and Bulgaria refused to participate because the President of Kosovo was not invited (Press Release, FYROM President Office, 29 May 2013). This was another fiasco for Serbian diplomacy and efforts to pressure those that it can go along with its agenda.

The influence of the EU in the region must remain constant to ensure the reform and the democratic development of the institutions. Any risk of such an influence diminishing due to enlargement fatigue or financial crisis would be devastating for the Balkan region, and damaging for the EU itself. As Lehne (2013, Carnegie Europe, 23 April 2013) has observed the enlargement fatigue could become a reform fatigue and the process could degenerate in a double bluff where the EU pretends to remain open to accession and the Western Balkans pretends to reform.

The agreement did not necessarily dismantle the Serbian parallel institutions in the northern Kosovo but rather found the way to legitimise them by, somehow, integrating them in the Kosovo legal framework.

As both Serbia and Kosovo progress through their EU integration process the issue of the political map of both the countries eventually could arise if the EU is not ready to accept another Cyprus scenario. This may lead to another paradox of how many EU members recognise which country on which borders. How this will develop only time will show. The sooner the EU starts to deal with this issue the clearer the relations between Kosovo and Serbia will be, otherwise this agreement may end in the drawers of history as just another diplomatic theatre of the Balkans.

Reconciliation (especially of a century long conflict between Albanians and Serbs over Kosovo) is not an easy task and will take time. The crucial issue of the reconciliation is first the political settlement. Second is the process of debunking earlier constructed hate language based on contending historic narratives full of myths, fairy tales and inconsistent historical evidence. This requires strength and acknowledgment of any crimes committed on behalf of such narratives. Only then the reconciliation will be successful. Whether this will require a few more years or generations depends on the willingness of the political elites in Serbia and Kosovo and the willingness of the EU to ease, facilitate and mediate such a process.

Kosovo and Serbia relations should be normalised based on their mutual interest in peace and harmony between the two nations to ensure a long-lasting peace. The only way to achieve this at this stage depends from the pressures of the EU and the way in which the leaders in both countries present this normalisation of relations to their publics, whether this process is happening because of the EU pressures or because of the necessity for a better future for both the countries and the region.

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