

Helsinki bulletin



HELSINKI COMMITTEE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA
address: Rige od Fere 20,
Belgrade, Serbia
tel. +381-11-3032-408; fax. 2639-437;
e-mail: office@helsinki.org.rs
http://www.helsinki.org.rs

No.68 // SEPTEMBER 2010

FOREIGN POLICY U-TURN: THE FAILED MANIPULATION OF KOSOVO

The opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's independence, Serbia's agreement to a joint resolution on Kosovo with the EU in the UN General Assembly and the refusal of a London court to extradite Ejub Ganić at Serbia's request all testify to the Serbian national program coming up against the resolve of the EU and the US not to allow the redrawing of Balkan borders

President Boris Tadić's Kosovo policy over the past year has been at the expense of his popularity in Western circles, and one might even talk about disappointment in Belgrade's behaviour. The behaviour of Vuk Jeremić, the foreign affairs minister, has been a particular irritation to the EU and the US. This dissatisfaction has also been apparent in the increasingly frequent meetings between Westerners and SNS head Toma Nikolić during the summer.

The number of visits by European officials to Belgrade during the summer and the diplomatic initiative of the EU and the US, which resulted in the joint resolution on Kosovo, show that Belgrade no longer has room to manoeuvre.

The EU managed to present a unified front on Kosovo, to the surprise of Belgrade which had



counted on its internal divisions and the fact that five EU members have still not recognised Kosovo. The message which German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle brought to Belgrade, that "the map of the Western Balkans has now been redrawn" and that "the independence of Kosovo and its territorial integrity are practical facts" was more than clear¹. British Foreign Secretary William Hague was even clearer: "My position is completely the same

as that of my German colleague Guido Westerwelle: that the main goal is to secure EU membership for all Balkan nations. The fear is that Serbia might be stopped midway on its road towards the EU if it does not reconcile its past with its future²,"he said.

Stefan Füle, the European commissioner for enlargement, suggested that Serbia's road to the European family depends on political decisions and specifically on resolution of the Kosovo issue, so that Serbia's path to the EU "will not lead through shortcuts" but be "according to merit" and that it will depend on the success of reform processes³."

The latest declaration of Serge Brammertz also indicates that Serbia cannot expect candidate status without the arrest of Ratko Mladić. He emphasised his dissatisfaction with the hunt for refugees, saying "We have no time. This tribunal is closing down. Because of that we need arrests now, in order to arrive at judgments commensurate with the crimes. I find it difficult to believe that geopolitical issues take precedence over the satisfaction of international justice⁴."

The planned visit of Hilary Clinton to Belgrade in mid-October also indicates that the West is entering the culminating phase of its policies on the Balkans.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST BORIS TADIĆ

The about face forced on the Serbian leadership and especially on President Boris Tadić has come under attack from the conservative bloc. The opposition, including Tomislav Nikolić and Vojislav Koštunica, tried to exploit the judgement of the International Court of

Justice as a reason for early elections, claiming that the current government was responsible for the failure of foreign policy.

The fact is that the foreign policy of recent years was the result of a consensus of all political forces (apart from the LDP and some minor parties) and the whole conservative bloc, and that responsibility for the bankruptcy of that policy belongs to the whole political elite. This seriously devalues both their initiative and their criticism.

The expectation of the EU that Belgrade and Pristina will begin dialogue about issues which would improve the everyday life of both communities has still not been agreed on but, given the insistence of the international community, this can be expected in the near future.

CONSERVATIVE BLOC: KOSOVO AND REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

The strategy broadly coordinated between the EU and the US for the containment of the Balkan issue and dealing with Serbia in the context of the present situation, has been met by the conservative bloc with increasingly aggressive demands for the partition of Bosnia. At the same time, Tadić and the current government are accused of capitulation to the West and of sacrificing everything to the service of the policy that "there is no alternative to the EU".

Essentially, the Serbian elite has long ago given up on Kosovo. However it has been skilfully manipulated in order to demand the secession of Republika Srpska. This has involved the entire Serbian elite, particularly the jurists, who have pushed the Kosovo issue through every

2 *Danas*, August 31, 2010

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Danas*, September 21, 2010

possible international mechanism in order to lend legitimacy to the opening of the question of the division of Bosnia.

Academics, the authors of the Memorandum, have been particularly active in this, using every opportunity to argue it in public. The most fierce attacks have been on the US and its key role in the Balkans in foiling Belgrade's achievement of its "historic goals in Bosnia". Thus Dobrica Ćosić emphasises that the US "has evolved from a democratic state into a monstrous police state"⁵, while Milorad Ekmečić claims that it is "a form of new fascism with a democratic tradition and under another name"⁶. Speaking about the Kosovo resolution, Ekmečić says: "It's a success, even though world is divided on it, even to our detriment. (...) This is one of our great battles, for people and states to stand against the United States. (...) The world must not allow America to strangle small states and nations in the dark". He holds the US responsible because "the 1992-95 civil war in Yugoslavia was conducted within the framework of the American axiom that the Serbian nation may not rebuild the state it created over the past two centuries but must remain politically fragmented with no higher level of unity"⁷

Dobrica Ćosić takes every opportunity to emphasise that "there is no greater or more serious task for the Serbian nation than preserving Republika Srpska in accordance with the principles of the Dayton Agreement. In that sense I see the policies of the present RS leadership, particularly Mr Dodik, as exceptional, determined, principled and skilful"⁸.

5 *Večernje Novosti*, Pitanje istine, September 2, 2010

6 *Večernje Novosti*, August 28, 2010

7 *Večernje Novosti*, August 28, 2010

8 *Večernje Novosti*, Pitanje istine, September 2, 2010 (when accepting a decoration in the Russian Embassy)

Vojislav Koštunica called on government representatives to resist "blackmail and pressure from Western powers which want Serbia to withdraw or change the text of the Resolution on Kosovo and Metohija"⁹. This, he says, is an important moment when Serbia must show it is a state which stands behind its decisions and will not backtrack under pressure and blackmail like a "puppet state"¹⁰. The DSS and other parties in the "nationalist coalition" see it as a mistake for Serbia to have gone to the UN General Assembly and say the issue should have remained with the Security Council where Serbia has a majority for its position on Kosovo¹¹.

Serbs in the north of Kosovo, those who are supported by Belgrade, see the Resolution on Kosovo as capitulation and "blackmail by the European Union"¹² and the coming dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina as accepting the independence of Kosovo as well as completely endangering the vital interests of Serbs¹³.

The reaction of Serbs in the enclaves is more realistic and indicative of their readiness to seek a practical solution. This was already clear when a number of Serbs voted in last year's local elections in Kosovo. Especially constructive in this respect are the presidents of the municipalities of Štrpci and Gračanica. Rada Trajković, one of the most respectable Serbian figures in Kosovo says that "the status of Kosovo should not be discussed in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina because insistence on this issue would contribute to the

9 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/Srbija/760276/Za+i+protiv+kompromisa>

10 "www.nin.rs"

11 Koštunica described the changes to the UN resolution, which itself he regards as inadequate to protect state and national interests, as "emphasising the white flag and the surrender of Kosovo".

12 Marko Jakšić, vice president of the Union of Serbian Municipalities of Northern Kosovo and Metohija

13 Milan Ivanović, President of the SNV of Northern KiM

continuing destabilisation of the Serbian community in Kosovo. (...) For now it is more important to discuss the standard of living of the people rather than status.”

BATTLE FOR REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

The denouement of the Kosovo issue at the international level is being accompanied by an increasingly worsening situation in Bosnia. Messages coming from Republika Srpska are incendiary and hostile to both internal and external stakeholders, particularly in the atmosphere of campaigning for the elections due on October 3, 2010.

Nebojša Radmanović, the Serbian member of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Presidency, has said: “It is essential for BiH to support the Belgrade resolution because, if Serbia guarantees the territorial integrity of BiH, BiH should probably guarantee the territorial integrity of Serbia¹⁴”.

At the same time, Milorad Dodik said that BiH cannot vote against Serbia’s resolution in the UN, and “suggested to Bosniac and Croat leaders in Bosnia that “should they behave any other way and manipulate the facts to do so privately, then there will be a problem in BiH¹⁵”.

14 *Glas Srpske*, August 25, 2010

15 Just three days after making this statement, Dodik said that over the next four years the issue of Republika Srpska’s final status would be opened, debated

Politicians in Serbia itself ostentatiously emphasise that they back the preservation of Republika Srpska. Serbian Internal Affairs Minister Ivica Dačić, visiting Banjaluka on September 5, announced: “We firmly support the position that any change to Dayton must be the result of discussion between the two entities – Republika Srpska and the Bosnian Federation.” He emphasised the existence of a double standard among international powers in the Balkans: “Those who defend BiH’s territorial integrity and who now claim that any partitioning of northern Kosovo would violate the territorial integrity of this self-proclaimed state, did not themselves respect the territorial integrity of Serbia. On the contrary, they removed about 15 per cent of Serbia’s territory¹⁶.”

Nikola Špirić, the chairman of BiH’s Council of Ministers, has said that only Sarajevo can expel Republika Srpska from BiH, because anyone who is against Dayton is for the independence of Republika Srpska. And because “the degree of hatred emanating from Sarajevo towards Republika Srpska will ensure another status. In this situation Republika Srpska need do nothing.”¹⁷

and closed – there will be increased pressure from the international community and “ahead lies a great and difficult struggle for the preservation of Republika Srpska’s standing and its hijacked authority”. (*Večernje Novosti*, August 28, 2010)

16 *Politika*, September 6, 2010

17 *Srna*, September 14, 2010

SUMMARY

The international community (the EU and the US) through its concerted policy on the Kosovo issue has created the momentum for resolution of the Bosnian question. The moment must be seized. Meanwhile, the international community still has no developed strategy or formula for overcoming problems in Bosnia.

The international community must prevent northern Kosovo acquiring a special status like that of Republika Srpska, the solution towards which Belgrade is gravitating. This would have numerous negative consequences. These would include Kosovo Albanians seeking the same status for Albanians in southern Serbia and preventing the integration of local Serbs into Kosovo society. The state of Kosovo would become dysfunctional and many issues would remain unresolved.

Serbia needs to use this to make a U-turn in its regional and international policy in order to achieve EU candidate status as soon as possible. This is the only way to combat the local conservative forces who see a closer association with the EU as the greatest threat to their territorial aspirations.

Within the framework of the new policy, Belgrade must begin dialogue with Pristina as soon as possible, in order to ensure, through the resolution of day-to-day problems of both communities, that life in Kosovo is sustainable for Serbs.

Serbia's new policy must align itself particularly positively with the expected constitutional changes in BiH and the establishment of a common education system in order to overcome divisions and enable the building of a united identity for BiH.