

Helsinki *bulletin*



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KOSOVO PARTITION: A MISSION IMPOSSIBLE



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The Serb elite saw the upcoming decision on the country's EU candidacy as its last opportunity to round off the "unfinished" Kosovo task. Some politicians have been openly speaking about the partition scenario since this spring. Division of Kosovo - Belgrade's long-standing plan – has been thus for first time turned into an official offer. The option itself has never been on the table as Belgrade waited for

situation in the North to develop into a fait accompli and accepted as such. It also waited for a change in the constellation of global powers, which would, as many analysts claimed, play into Belgrade's hands.

The international community tacitly backed the Kosovo government in its plan to take over Jarinje and Brnik border crossing stations and

thus consolidate the state. In response, “a log revolution” broke out with Belgrade’s support. Belgrade so messaged that it still considered the Kosovo status an open issue.

Growing tensions in the North throughout the summer culminated in the incident at the Jarinje crossing, provoked by Serbs. However, the prompt and efficient response by KFOR and the international community came as a surprise. Publication of intelligence reports on planning and execution of this scenario additionally compromised Belgrade.

The Pride Parade scheduled for October 2, 2011, was also used for fueling the atmosphere of insecurity and chaos among citizens. The parade was also used as a trump card in the election campaign, meant to win over the extremely conservative parts of the society. But its final cancellation was meant to radicalize the issue of North Kosovo.

The attempt at partition (through barricades) failed but compromised the ruling coalition in the international community at the point when Serbia was expected to present itself in the best light possible while awaiting for EU candidacy. This only added to the impression that the Serb elite is in fact not after EU membership.

Regardless of the tensions in and about Kosovo, the ruling coalition still considers EU candidacy a major advantage in the upcoming elections. Therefore, it promptly activated another option – autonomy for North Kosovo.

Both the government and the opposition so much manipulated citizens’ emotions for North Kosovo that citizens are now more and more antagonistic about European integrations, taking EU responsible for the situation over there. The much promoted thesis about “always new conditions for Serbia” produced a notably negative effect.

Slowed down reforms, tensions and conflicts in North Kosovo and the ban on the Pride Parade indicate a much deeper crisis within a larger context. The political class’ inability to represent Serbia as a democratic and modernization-oriented country eleven years after Milosevic’s ouster, dramatically questioned European prospects for its citizens.

LOG REVOLUTION IN KOSOVO NORTH

During the two-month “log revolution” several protesters and KFOR troops were wounded in the shooting of September 27. Belgrade authorities, uncritically backed by the media, claimed that KFOR troops provoked the conflict at the Jarinje border station. They used “combat ammunition” against “unarmed civilians,” they said. As Belgrade insisted that an “investigation in the incident” and a proof of “KFOR responsibility” should come first a new round of Belgrade-Prishtina negotiations in Brussels had to be cancelled.

Few days later (on September 30) the Serbian parliamentary Committee for Security met at a closed session to discuss the issue. Though they had insisted on the meeting in the first place, MPs from the Serb Radical Party (SRS) walked out: the head of their caucus, Dragan Todorovic, told the press that the facts presented to the meeting by people from intelligence services were “closer to those provided by NATO.” That was the first sign that something was wrong with the information already circulating in almost all the media. Vuk Draskovic, leader of SPO, was the first to speak out about it – in an interview with Radio Free Europe and then at TV B92. According to him, the intelligence officers addressing the session said the incident had been provoked by Serbs (a group organized by a “controversial businessman,” Zvonko



MILOŠ JELEŠEVIĆ

Veselinovic) and that both sides used combat ammunition.¹

The session “affair” once again laid bare the ruling coalition’s duplicity – that it “knows but would not tell” what will happen with Kosovo. Embittered by the latest developments, ex-premier Zoran Zivkovic (in premiership after Zoran Djindjic’s assassination) wrote in an authorial piece, “Perfidious demagogues in politics are lying to the West, lying to Russians, lying to Kosovo Serbs and lying to all citizens of Serbia.”²

INSTRUMENTALIZED PRIDE PARADE

The political elite have questioned the Pride Parade from the very beginning. The ruling coalition avoided coming public with a clear-cut stance on it. Police Minister Ivica Dacic was the

¹ http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/draskovic_vlast_laze_gradjane_o_dogadjajima_na_jarinju_/24347183.html.

² Danas, October 4, 2011.

only one insisting on a governmental stance on the one hand but himself advocating a ban on the parade for security reasons on the other.

In tandem with *Dveri* (an organization symbolizing pro-fascist Serbia) the police trade union prepared the terrain for the ban on the parade. It appealed to LGBT organizations to demonstrate “understanding for traditional values cherished by the great majority of Serbia citizens and awareness about the security risk, and consequently give up on the Pride Parade.” According to Minister Ivica Dacic, various organizations opposing the parade had planned serious conflicts. “In addition to /using/ baseball bats, chains, petards, bags and condoms with paint, explosives in plastic bottles for vitamins, they had planned to abduct a public bus to run into the participants in the Parade,” he said. “Also, some groups had planned to provoke incidents resulting in human losses and thus send a political message. They were after a North African scenario for Serbia that would spread beyond Belgrade,” he emphasized.³

³ www.b92.net, October 1, 2011.

Following in his footsteps, the *Alo* tabloid “discovered” that extremist groups would assault seats of some parties such as SPO, LDP and DS and of some non-governmental organizations like Women in Black and Youth Initiative, as well as individuals like Natasa Kandic or Sonja Biserko.⁴

The Pride “dilemma” generated xenophobic and anti-Western rhetoric. This includes statements such as “/They want/ to break Serbia’s spine,” “A militant movement is after changing people’s collective consciousness and destroying traditional values” and “/This is/ a major form of a special war against Serbia.”

Patriarch Irinej himself appealed to “the upright segment of the population” to stay home on October 2 and thus boycott the Pride Parade.⁵ “I would justifiably label this calamity the Shame Parade rather than the Pride Parade that mudds human dignity and tramples on the holiness of human life and family,” he said in an epistle.⁶

MISUNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit (August 23) put an end to Belgrade’s calculating strategy for keeping alive the illusion – three years after Kosovo’s independence declaration – that, sooner or later, the international community would accept the status quo in Kosovo North for reality. Her straightforward request to Belgrade to dismantle parallel structures in the North and thus enable its legal integration into Kosovo’s sociopolitical system only made public what international players had been constantly telling Serbia’s officials.

⁴ *Alo*, October 5, 2011.

⁵ *Pecat*, September 30, 2011.

⁶ <http://www.spc.rs/sr/>

However, Angela Merkel’s clear-cut stances hardly made any difference in media reporting on and about Kosovo. The partition scenario for Kosovo continued to circulate through numbers of stories and published analyses by foreigners “with understanding for Serb argumentation.”

In parallel – but more frequently and openly than before – was the proposal for “substantial autonomy for North Kosovo,” an “Ahtisaari plan plus” and a political dialogue with Kosovo advocated at public scene. This proposal indicates that Serbia has a reserve plan about Kosovo: should the partition scenario fail, we would go after “status insurance” in the form of a special entity (by the model of Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Vladimir Todoric, director of the New Policy Center – a non-governmental organization close to the Democratic Party, says that the government might change both its rhetoric and behavior. According to him, Belgrade has too long and overoptimistically thought the United States would change its mind about the partition and, therefore, “raised the question of a special status at the best moment.” “A little time left should be spent on the formulation of a realistic offer for obtaining the biggest possible autonomy for Serbs in the North, while maintaining the existing degree of decentralization in the South,” says Todoric.⁷

The New Policy Center has publicized a platform for Serbia-Kosovo negotiations, including questions on which agreement is possible.⁸ Accordingly, Kosovo’s functional independence would not be based on its constitution but on a tripartite agreement between Serbia, Kosovo and EU, the latter acting as a warrant (approved by UN and verified by a new resolution). “Serbia’s sovereignty would be declaratively

⁷ *Politika*, September 30, 2011.

⁸ <http://www.cnp.rs/articles/view/22>.

acknowledged by the tripartite agreement specifying that it 'delegates' sovereign authorities to Kosovo. From the legal point of view, this would mean that these authorities derive from the Constitution of Serbia, which is crucial in the event Kosovo breaches the agreement to the detriment of the Serb community...Serb communities would have a common institution to coordinate their activities and communicate with Belgrade. This assembly of Serb municipalities would not pass laws but would be empowered to make decisions in the domain of 'delegated competences,'" quotes the platform.

Further, Serb municipalities should be demilitarized – except for "the Kosovo police that should be under the control of EULEX." A body composed of representatives of Serbia, Kosovo and EU would monitor the implementation of the agreement. At the international scene Serbia would be speaking for Kosovo Serbs as much as possible and this segment should not be questioned. Kosovo Serbs would have dual citizenship and would not be discriminated in visa policy. The platform also puts forth the possibility of having a Serbian consulate in the "administrative center of the Serb community."

PARTITION OF KOSOVO – BELGRADE'S OLD OPTION

"Separation from Albanians," "historical agreement between Serbs and Albanians," "correction of borders," etc. are nothing but euphemisms for secession of Kosovo North and its unification with Serbia. Actually, that's the only strategy Belgrade has had for almost half a century. The plan as such has never been presented as an official policy. It has been publicly discussed by its author, academician Dobrica Cosic, and people from his circles (such as Aleksandar Despic in 1997), as well as by some domestic and foreign analysts and commentators.

In the first half of 2011 the police minister and vice-premier, Ivica Dacic, was the first to officially go public with the idea.⁹ Shortly before him, Dobrica Cosic gave an interview to *Politika* the paper published in sequels for three days. Serbia's policy for Kosovo has been wrong "since the time of Pasic," said Cosic reminding that he himself has been speaking and writing about this problem for four decades in vain, while "suggesting a democratic, just, compromising and lasting separation" as the only way to "overcome the centuries long antagonism between Albanians and Serbs."¹⁰

Cosic once again seized the opportunity to emphasize that he had discussed the idea with Slobodan Milosevic on several occasions. In 1991 he even passed on to him /Milosevic/ "the American plan for Kosovo partition, according to which Serbia would get one-third of Kosovo and Metohija."¹¹ But Milosevic wouldn't give up "Serb delusions," concludes Cosic. The involvement of the United States in the story about Kosovo partition was probably meant to strengthen the argumentation. True, Serbian media often run articles by some American experts and analysts, mostly those close to the conservative Keito Institute.¹² The expert for the Institute, Ted Carpenter, published an article headlined "The Dangers of Rejecting Balkan Partitions" in *The National Interest* magazine. For him, Morton Abramowitz and James Hooper are "marvelously selective about their outrage regarding the acceptance of secession and partition as a policy tool." "Relatively few among the European or U.S. political and policy elite had any problem when the NATO powers helped break up Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Even fewer expressed qualms about forcibly detaching Kosovo from Serbia,"

⁹ Helsinški bilten, br. 80.

¹⁰ Politika, 29. maj 2011.

¹¹ Isto.

¹² Their views are usually published in Washinton Times but in other papers as well.

writes Carpenter.¹³ “Why, then, the squeamishness about considering a new Balkan strategy that involves a modest territorial adjustment in Kosovo and a decision to abandon the clearly failed nation-building project in Bosnia?”¹⁴

Stephen Mayer, frequently speaking for Belgrade-seated media, uses about the same argumentation. Not long ago, he repeated his theses as a guest of the “Cyrillic” talk show of the Happy TV.¹⁵

A section in the series of articles on Russia’s foreign policy by the Russian ex-premier and foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, *Politika* was running this September refers to Kosovo but not to the role Viktor Chernomyrdin played in the signing of Kumanovo Agreement in 1999. Primakov argues that Kosovo’s independence declaration was “a foreign policy problem with adverse effect on Russia-US relations.”¹⁶ The only solution to the deadlock in problem-settlement is “territorial separation,” he says.¹⁷

The *Blic* daily is among the influential metropolitan newspapers still holding Kosovo partition a possibility and trying to find interlocutors who will justify the thesis. The paper (like many others) seized the opportunity of the visit to Belgrade by the professor at the London School of Economics, James C. Lynzie to interview him. The interview was published under the headline “With a Good Plan There Are Still Chances for Kosovo Partition.” “If Serbia has to acknowledge Kosovo independence than Prishtina has to acknowledge that North belongs to Serbia,” he says.¹⁸

¹³ *Politika*, October 5, 2011.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ October 3, 2011.

¹⁶ *Politika*, September 24, 2011.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Blic*, October 3, 2011.

EU AND US RESOLUTE IN THEIR STANCE ON KOSOVO

The North Kosovo crisis crystallized EU’s and US’ positions: no new borders in the Balkans, they say as one.

As it seems that’s what US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, like Angela Merkel, told Boris Tadic straight in the face in New York at the UN Assembly. Hilary Clinton told the press that her meeting with the President of Serbia was “empty,” without content, and that she “heard nothing new that would have persuaded her that Belgrade was no longer after the partition scenario.”¹⁹

The messages European officials in visit to Belgrade are putting across are more and more clear – partition is out of question. At the Economic Summit in Belgrade Austrian State Secretary Wolfgang Waldner made no bones about Kosovo independence being a reality. Partition is not an option at all, he said, adding that a formula for settlement of the problem of North Kosovo has to be found as soon as possible.²⁰

The present-day reality is that there are “two Kosovos, a Serb and an Albanian,” retorted Deputy Premier and Police Minister Ivica Dacic. Then he elaborated the well-known (Covic’s) thesis about the necessity for a solution to Serb-Albanian conflict, which would “imply separation.”²¹

RUSSIA’S POSITION

At the very beginning of the crisis in North Kosovo this summer Russia was noticeably restrained. But then its Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Konuzin undiplomatic speech in

¹⁹ *Danas*, September 30, 2011.

²⁰ *Blic*, October 4, 2011.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Belgrade showed that Russia would not let go its influence in the region. Using strong language, rather unusual in diplomacy, Alexander Konuzin reproached Serbian participants in the Belgrade Security Forum for not standing up for the interests of their country in Kosovo. “Are there no Serbs at all in this hall?” he asked furiously. Some people in Serbia, he added, would readily sell economic facilities to anyone but Russians, though they know too well that these facilities are doomed.

Posters saying “Alexander Konuzin, Serb ambassador to Serbia” appeared in the streets of Belgrade shortly after the scandal. The action was orchestrated by “Serb National Movement 1389” in sign of support to the Russian Ambassador “under constant criticism and verbal assaults” after his address at the Security Forum.²²

Moscow backed Konuzin’s address called by many a diplomatic scandal. Discussing the issue Russian press concluded that the “incident” could affect Belgrade-Moscow alliance. After all what was it so awful that Konuzin did to deserve to be called a scandal master, wonders *The Voice of Russia*. What is actually scandalous is that the President of Serbia attended such a forum, adds the paper.

Though itself reaching an agreement after agreement with both EU and US, Moscow sticks to the position of Serbia’s envoy at international forums, particularly in UN and UNSC.

A RESERVE PLAN FOR KOSOVO

And yet Belgrade media do publicize the propositions – though not so many – advocating the acknowledgment of the realities in the search for the solution to the problem of Kosovo

²² Alo, September 22, 2011.

North. These propositions are usually presented as “Ahtisaari plan plus,” which implies territorial autonomies for Kosovo municipalities bordering on Serbia near Raska and Novi Pazar. A possible international conference on Kosovo is referred to in this context. Dragoljub Micunovic, president of DS Political Council, was the first to go public with this (semi)official initiative.

Voices for the “acceptance of the realities” are few but growingly present at the public scene. The Liberal Democratic Party /LDP/ is the most outspoken of all political parties: it advocates the acceptance of the Ahtisaari plan Serbia turned down in Vienna back in 2006. The Serb Renewal Movement and its leader, Vuk Draskovic, are of about the same opinion. According to Draskovic, Serbia should accept the “non-status” part of the Ahtisaari plan that would enable mutual connections among Serb municipalities and with Belgrade, whereas “regional autonomy for Serb municipalities south of the Ibar is anyway planned.” “The Ahtisaari plan is in many aspects a replica of the once Z-4 plan for Croatia’s Serbs and a combination of good solutions to similar bilateral and international conflicts in Europe,” says Draskovic. In his view, Serb municipalities north of the Ibar would have autonomy similar to that of South Tyrol.²³

Former public servants (ambassadors) and today’s independent analysts (such as Ognjen Pribicevic and Predrag Simic) also speak for a more rational approach in the search for the solution to the two-month crisis. As for influential commentator, Bosko Jaksic, journalist for *Politika*, belongs to the same circle.

The ruling Democratic Party /DS/ insists on “a peaceful solution” to be found “through a dialogue” – but its actual position is rather blurred. According to unofficial sources, even

²³ Politika, September 27, 2011.

members of the cabinet disagree about the steps to be taken, which is in itself indicative of different positions of the parties within the ruling coalition (Ivica Dacic, deputy premier and SPS leader, holds the most radical views about Kosovo). Interestingly, explaining her party leader's stance on partition, Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, parliamentary speaker, said, "He does not advocate a partition but a line of separation... This implies that in the places with Serb majority population Serb institutions should be in place."²⁴

So far Dragan Djilas, deputy president of DS, was the most outspoken about a possible change in Kosovo policy. Throughout its history Serbia has wasted too much labor and time on territories and the time has come for it to take care of people, he said in the "Impression of the Week" talk show aired by TVB92.²⁵

SUMMARY

As it seems, Belgrade wanted to have the partition scenario settled before obtaining the EU candidacy. In this it seemed to have counted on the international community's acceptance of a fait accompli. In this context it role-played a dialogue with Prishtina so as to postpone resolution of the issues affirming Kosovo's independence.

By radicalizing the Kosovo problem Belgrade has jeopardized its position within EU. This resulted in turmoil at the political scene already in the election campaign shiver.

Now that the partition scenario is ruled out Belgrade can easily solve the Kosovo issue. The "Ahtisaari plan plus" formula is growingly in circulation.

Belgrade's insistence on an ethnically-based model only deepens segregation. On the other hand, Belgrade would not allow territorial autonomies for minority communities in the territory under its power. With such policy Belgrade deepens conflicts with neighboring countries, while native Serbs in these countries pay the highest cost.

Kosovo North controlled by Serbs is an unsafe place to live in for Serbs themselves. Freedom of expression is denied. People with opposing stands are threatened – by Serbs.

The Serbian government and the President of the Republic have not distanced themselves yet from "log revolutionaries." Had the government taken a resolute stand the tensions would lessen and passions calm down even among Serbia's citizens who realized long ago that Kosovo could not be restored. Kosovo Serbs, including those in the North, distrust Belgrade's policy and are by far more realistic about the actual situation.

Now that dark clouds hang over Serbia's EU candidacy the government should do its utmost to repair the effects of the unwise radicalization of the situation in North Kosovo and demonstrate readiness for constructive resumption of the dialogue with Prishtina – and do it till December when EU member-states will discuss the Commission's recommendation for Serbia's candidacy.

²⁴ Danas, October 10, 2011.

²⁵ TVB92, October 2, 2011