

25 April 2013

Anything Else Would Mean Going Back into the Past

*Negotiators from Belgrade and Prishtina achieved maximum, renouncing some initial goals. This is the essence of a compromise and of a historic agreement that must be supported, Svilanovic said in an interview to **Milos Miloradovic***

It is a historic agreement, all participants deserve congratulations, the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council and former FRY Prime Minister, Goran Svilanovic says.

“It is important that both Serbian and Kosovo public understand that nobody achieved maximum goals, but this always happens when a compromise is sought, everybody must give up some ideas they had when they sat at the table. I believe that there were many emotions and this is something that will accompany negotiators during their lives, they will constantly wonder if they could do more and better. I think that they achieved as much as they could. That is why they deserve congratulations”, Svilanovic told Novi magazin.

“We will all now focus on the implementation of the agreement, which will be a new great test of readiness for an honest cooperation. I expect that the implementation of what has been agreed now will be translated into concrete dates and steps in the next negotiation process related to the EU accession, both for Serbia and Kosovo, and that it will be an essential element of the accession process. The Serbian government will do good by dealing with this, and with the issue of how to employ Serbs in the north of Kosovo by being able to offer more to foreign investors in the new, more stable circumstances. I hope that the new partner relations between governments in Belgrade and Prishtina will also be seen through joint attracting of the investors. If the economic status of Serbs in the north also improves owing to the reached agreement, it will obtain a special meaning.”

What do you think about claims that the negotiators gambled with the stake and offer?

I am confident that Serbia's negotiating team did its best to reach an agreement, in order to enable people of Serbia to live better, and to look into the future full of hope. Anything else would mean going back to the past.

Are you surprised because the current Government signed the agreement, and not the previous one?

A year ago, I was not sure what to expect from this government, but now, as a citizen of Serbia, I am satisfied. This government did what previous ones could not, because circumstances did not allow them. We must not be overly strict with regard to the previous government, which started the process and went as far as they could when its mandate was approaching to an end, exposed to intense public pressure.

The experience known from the history of diplomacy was confirmed: difficult decisions require a government with a flawless "patriotic legitimacy", and the support that the Government of Serbia obtained by combating corruption is also of great importance.

Does the Agreement forget Serbs in enclaves in the south of Kosovo?

I would not say that they were forgotten, although this agreement grants some more rights to Serbs in the north, due to the acceptance of reality that the sovereignty of Kosovo authorities towards the Serb community in the north is restricted. Rights arising from the Ahtisaari Plan related to the Serb community in the other parts of Kosovo guarantee high level of protection, but their situation is more difficult.

One reason behind it is the inadequate implementation of everything that was guaranteed to them by the Plan. In order to increase the level of respecting these rights, continual communication with the government of Kosovo is required, and this is one of the tasks of the Serbian government, but not by bypassing Kosovo institutions, but through constant cooperation with those who negotiated on the rights of Serbs in the north. Mediators in this dialogue, the EU should assist them there.

The situation of Serbs in the enclaves is additionally aggravated because Belgrade views them as traitors when they try to regulate their lives by accepting the reality that they are under the sovereignty of Kosovo, and when they try to influence political processes, run at the elections, participate in the government or in the opposition.

As the Rubicon was crossed, I expect that Belgrade will now show actual interest in helping these people. Not with packages and folklore, but politically, to accept them as Serbs who decided to live and work under new circumstances, who would like to be accepted as partners by

the Serbian government. This would significantly increase their role in Kosovo's political life as well.

Deputy Prime Minister Suzana Grubjesic says that offers for Kosovo are getting worse. In 2005, as an expert of the International Commission on the Balkans, you proposed a four-step solution with autonomy for Serbs. Ahtisaari was also rejected. How much does the Agreement give?

It is true that the Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, Suzana Grubjesic said. I will give you an example: Hans Haekkerup, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Kosovo, prepared a Constitutional Framework for Kosovo and gave us the proposal six months before adoption, in order to provide our comments and remarks. I proposed that we do this, and the position of the Serbian government was that they did not want to participate in this process, because it legitimised the independence of Kosovo, and that this paper was to be ignored. Despite this, as a minister, I asked an expert group to prepare our comments.

Upon expiry of the six months, when everyone in Belgrade saw that the date of the document adoption came, they asked me to say something on this topic after all and to intervene. The international community replied that our proposals were excellent, that it would have been good if we submitted them earlier, and not on the date of adoption of the Constitutional Framework for Kosovo. And that there was no time for anybody to deal with our proposals.

And this attitude, ignoring the reality and avoiding to openly participate in the most important political process marked all these years, since 2000. The same attitude was present during Vienna negotiations, and the biggest opportunity was missed during the work of Ahtisaari's team on the plan for Kosovo.

It is still the only document that defines both the situation in the field and political processes. And it became the Kosovo Constitution.

Instead of Serbia's constant negotiations and proposals, the Government was allowed to hold patriotic speeches, send humanitarian aid to Serbs in Kosovo, without telling them the truth about the forthcoming events and, which is even worse, completely avoiding to influence things that it could have influenced, fearing from the reaction of the Serbian public; and to pump the public with quasi-patriotic rhetoric. This is why every new proposal was worse than the previous one.

We allowed the time to pass by, believing that a higher power and not we would change the reality. Only communication with our public existed, instead with those who created the future. This is the key reason why I support the action of the Serbian government; they sat down at the

table, negotiated, and achieved their maximum. There is no need for anybody to reprove them, especially those who were in power in Serbia for a single day since 2000 to date.

How important it is that the Democratic Party (DP) will not try to overthrow the Government on the issue of Kosovo?

This is very important for the country's stability and progress. The Democratic Party is in a difficult position, but this is still the strongest and most serious opposition party, which will in the future seek citizens' support for return to power. I think that it is DP's duty to unconditionally support the agreement, and to get ready to support the Government in its implementation, and to be ready to apply this agreement once they get to participate in the government.

I believe that this agreement will enable this, and every next Serbian government to fully concentrate on the difficult economic and social situation.

Will the issue of Kosovo's seat in the UN come to table?

Possible UN membership of Kosovo, just like UN membership of any other state, is subject to a procedure where not only Serbia's position will be important, but also positions of several other countries, primarily permanent members of the UN Security Council, and other members of the UN General Assembly. I think that this is a process that should not be connected to this agreement.

How is the date, which is almost certain, important for Serbia?

Extremely. It is a breaking point that generations worked for, that people were killed for. Like Zoran Djindjic. This is why we are now to support those who are trying to achieve the same goals. It is good for Serbia that the political direction set in 2000 is still its dominant political feature. Governments changed, but this main direction defined in 2000 elections, which was later fought for and won in the streets of Belgrade on October 5 remained unchanged.

In these 13 years, the EU issue was ideological and political. From the moment when the negotiations start, it will become daily life of the state administration, of the entire state apparatus. It will be a process that will take long, but it will become less political, and more technical; technical in the best meaning of the word.

It is a process of reforming the country in every segment. Citizens will be relieved when negotiations about chapters 23 and 24 related to functioning of legal state and combat against corruption start.

Memories from Gnjilane

You are originally from Gnjilane. When did you last go to Kosovo?

Last month. I was born there and spent my early childhood there. Of course I am attached to my home town. Neither Gnjilane, nor Kosovo are the same as they were when I was a child, but anyone can say that for their native place. Belgrade is not the same city 50 years later.

I am extremely attached to everything that I carry from a large urban family with two aunts and three uncles, their children, my brothers and sisters. This is a childhood I would want for my children. But my family does not live there any longer and I have to face it. They struggle for existence on a daily basis, just like thousands of other Serbs who unwillingly left Kosovo.

Impetus to the region**What does the Agreement bring to the region?**

Stability. Regional cooperation is a consisting part of SAA that was signed by aspirant countries with the EU. Relations in the region must go forward, because it is the only possible path. After all, this is already happening.

What will the South East Europe 2020 Strategy that you are preparing bring to the region?

We are in the midst of a large economic crisis, which made lives of the poorest impossible and practically destroyed the middle class. The majority is unemployed. Those who do have jobs, work for low salaries with constant fear of unemployment. The Strategy is the RCC's contribution to overcoming the economic crisis in the region, and its main goal is to increase employment. We bring back competitiveness and development in the focus of regional cooperation, in addition to the EU accession of course, because the document leans on Europe 2020 strategy. We expect ministers of economy to adopt the Strategy in November.

They gave green light to the strategy development and set the following goals: employment growth from 40 to 45%, increase in mutual trade by 230%, GDP rise from the current 38% to 46% of EU average. Our goal is also to increase the total inflow of direct foreign investments in the region by 120%, and to have 300,000 more people with high education on the labour market. With serious chances for employment, of course. In order to make this happen, production, trade, investments and education must be improved, and governments must be far more efficient than they are nowadays.

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Source: Novi magazin

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