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Kosovo Cannot Serve as a Signpost to Others

The process of establishing a new architecture of security and stability of this part of Europe is finished and opening new ethno-state processes would open a Pandora box of long-term uncertainty and instability. This would undoubtedly suspend any chance of European integration process.

• UN General Assembly adopted Kosovo Resolution, submitted by Serbia with the EU support, several days ago. What is the significance of this document, which should open the door to talks between Belgrade and Pristina, for future relations in the region?

I would say that this is a very important event as manifold political processes and political deliberations underline the resolution itself which can really have an important influence not only on the character of future Belgrade-Pristina relations but can also significantly contribute to further normalization of conditions in the region primarily through readiness and openness for dialogue even in circumstances when positions and views of the countries from the region are different and even completely opposite as it is in this case. Due to complexity of relations among many countries from this part of Europe, the openness for dialogue is a key for maintaining and continuation and, I would like to believe, strengthening the present atmosphere of mutual approximation and openness. It can be noticed that the Resolution on this matter comes at the moment when the region is marked by a climate of rapprochement, not to say détente by the old political vocabulary. There is no doubt that everyone could only benefit from continuation and strengthening this trend and its turning into an irreversible political process.

As for positions of Belgrade and Pristina, contemporary history of international relations teaches us that pragmatic dialogue on concrete issues of direct interest for national communities is the best way to eliminate confrontation, uncertainty or maintaining prolonged frustrating situation. Particularly encouraging in this case is readiness and tact on the part of Belgrade to align its actions with the European Union – I understand all layers of difficulties Belgrade has with regards to Kosovo's independence, from legal and historic to political and emotional, and with regards to this, it would seem that the ability and readiness to remain on European path and at the same time find room for dialogue with Pristina should be even more appreciated. There is no

doubt that this dialogue, even with good services from the European Union, will be complex and even painstaking. However, it is important that the process has started, that the train has left the station. You see, in post-war divided Germany negotiations on coal supply to Western Berlin under siege were not easy. Nor did China and Taiwan establish air traffic without negotiation pains. Life simply tries to find solutions for life issues of citizens. After all, dialogue can always bring innovative solutions.

Come Out from the Past

• Is Kosovo's example applicable to BiH as we hear it more and more often from Milorad Dodik and other Serb politicians who state that the advisory opinion of the Court of Justice in the Hague is a signpost for Republic of Srpska?

You will understand that I cannot comment on internal situation of Regional Cooperation Council member states and the same goes for BiH. I can only assess how and to which extent developments in a country could influence security, stability and thus regional cooperation, as this is within the Council's mandate. In terms of this, having in mind that this is a pre-election time in BiH, including in the RS, and also knowing that certain rhetoric regarding Kosovo can be a kind of outlet for many in Serbia, I believe that everyone is clear about a common-sense fact: there is no stability of the region without stability of BiH. Opening centripetal processes here would open new dangerous potentials for new divisions and jeopardize stability of entire countries. I believe that the process of establishing a new architecture of security and stability of this part of Europe is finished and opening new ethno-state processes would open a Pandora box of long-term uncertainty and instability. This would undoubtedly suspend any chance of European integration process. International community would simply isolate part of the region and postpone any idea of enlargement. Part of our region would find itself in full isolation and quarantine. In the times of economic and social crisis, it is needless to say what this would mean for people from this region. Undoubtedly, political leaderships from the region know all this as well.

However, the rule saying – in order to have relaxation of tension, tension should firstly be increased – is sometimes applicable in politics. Therefore, talking seriously, Kosovo is neither legally nor politically as you say a signpost for anyone else. However, this does not mean that increasing rhetoric should be responded by counter rhetoric. If so, then one remains in a vicious circle – some will say they want to open a window and leave, others will close the door from within but the house will generally remain unorganized. I believe that BiH among all should use this momentum of rapprochement in the region. It should be recognized and admitted that BiH is not the only country in the world established upon a peace agreement; historical responsibility should be taken as well as a starting point that all three people have equal sovereign rights to agree and decide in what kind of a country they wish to live. Democratic representativeness

should be harmonized with national. In short, one should come out of the past and turn to future, move from Dayton to Brussels.

• Croatia is almost at the end of its negotiation process with the European Union and in two years the most, it will become full member state. It is expected that Belgrade will soon intensify its talks with Brussels, especially after the adoption of Kosovo Resolution. How will these two things influence BiH's path towards the EU – can it happen that, due to its lagging behind its neighbours, BiH remains a gray zone in this part of Europe?

Again, I have to answer your question from regional aspect. So, there is no doubt that the expected near conclusion of negotiations between Croatia and the EU, and the following signing the accession agreement, will be a historic step forward for Croatia, and that this would have positive and stimulating effects on other countries from the region aspiring to membership. Furthermore, if the Union continues with thus far strategic concept of individual accession, Serbia will too, in a due period, open the negotiations. I would even say that this process will be accelerated though I would not dare make any prognosis. European Union is presently burdened with number of challenges: economic crisis, enlargement fatigue, Turkish membership issue, relations with Russia, energy, etc. It is not easy today to persuade MPs and media in Union states in the benefits of enlargement. Apropos, this is one of the reasons why countries from this region need to aspire to as better as possible mutual relations, and resolve the remaining issues. For example, you have seen Germany helping Greece to come out of the crisis and then Chancellor Merkel losing local election. What elections could she or Sarkozy win if they advocate membership of a Balkan country carrying along an armful of outstanding issues with its neighbours. Hence, when the process is continued, BiH will face strategic, historical challenge. It will be surrounded by neighbours that will either be in the EU or NATO or will negotiate membership with the EU. Let us not forget, Montenegro will also be on this path. This is why I say that no one has greater or more important interest in using these processes and moving from political lethargy than BiH.

I hope that after the elections, political energy of all three constitutive people will be renewed as well as dialogue on constitutional solution. I have already explained on several occasions that this solution, according to my personal opinion, could be explored by EU negotiations screening formula which would clearly show which state functions are necessary for membership, with decentralization of all other powers and agreement on administrative system that would rest on Dayton with appropriate mutually agreed adjustments, while the entire process would be supported and monitored by an appropriate advisory mechanism, something like a model of support group, with predefined timeline.

Key Standard

• Foreign ministers of countries from the region and the EU, high-level officials of USA, Russia and Turkey – participants of the Ministerial Meeting EU – Western Balkans, held at the beginning of June in Sarajevo – stressed that the future of countries from this part of the world is in the EU. In the concluding document, Regional Cooperation Council, which you are heading, received good marks. To what extent did the Council, whose headquarters are located in the BiH capital, in fact managed to contribute to cooperation of countries in South East Europe?

I believe that Regional Cooperation Council was and is an important piece in the mosaic of cooperation being put together in this part of Europe over the past years. The fact is that a decade ago, and even some years ago, we could not speak of cooperation in this form and extent. Wars in this area along with historic heritage and numerous stereotypes and prejudices left their marks. However, at the same time as countries progress towards the European Union, they become more ready to mutual opening. It is not without reason that regional cooperation is a key political precondition, key standard in negotiation process and under the Stabilization and Association Agreement. At the end of the day, Regional Cooperation Council was established by the decisions of governments from this region and measurement of our success is in fact the measurement of primary engagement of thirteen governments from this part of Europe to truly incorporate European values and norms into their mutual relations.

Pockets of Resistance

• RCC presented its Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013 on Thursday. Fight against organized crime, corruption, illegal migrations, strengthening and coordination of bodies in the area of justice and home affairs, security cooperation... are some of the areas you intend to work in. What is the level of readiness for cooperation in the region regarding these issues?

Readiness for cooperation in the region is growing. It is becoming increasingly clear that the process of establishing national states is completed and that we are thus coming out of self-sufficiency phase, which also implied being closed. You see, as new national states were formed, it seemed that electrical energy was national, rivers flowed only to the national borders, oil pipelines ceased to exist at borders and there was no need to worry about the road after it crossed the border. This historically probably inevitable process is luckily over. At the same time, it is recognized that no one can live the paradox under which everyone wishes to join the European Union and at the same time some would not go with their neighbours. These two simply do not go together. Regional cooperation in concrete areas, together with everything else, is a trial test of readiness for European cooperation for all those you mentioned. Mutual market opening is a

test for future participation in joint European market. Of course, there are pockets of resistance – in social groups, industrial sectors, trade lobbies, etc. – which have, to put it roughly, profited from isolation. On the other hand, it is clearly visible in most societies in this region what this separation from Europe and world brought on social and moral plan.

Yugosphere – Just a Symbolism

• Prominent British reporter Tim Judah coined the term “Yugosphere” in his text for The Economist last year. This is topical again, particularly after the agreement on establishing a rail alliance, joint lottery game and a number of political and business moves. What is your opinion on this?

I will answer indirectly – why is this organization called Regional Cooperation Council? If you ask a Norwegian or Egyptian professor as to the matter of this, they will first ask what region is in question here. This is yet another example of complexity of this part of Europe. There is even no agreement on the region’s name. And now the tumult about some “Yugosphere” joins all those discussions about the Balkans, Western Balkans, South East Europe, etc. When you ask Turks, they are proud of the term Balkans since its meaning in the history of their identity carries deep emotions. When mentioning it to Croats, they raise their brows because many go to great trouble to confirm that their identity stems solely from other cultural areas and sources. On the other hand, due to their relations with Bosniaks, Serbs will frequently show aversion to Turkish elements of their own identity, and so on and on wondering in circles. Therefore, from political aspect, the format of joint state of South Slovenes has definitely passed into history but the fact is that there are similarities and closeness in national identities and it is not something one should be afraid of or something one should run away from. Why would Estonians hide that there are some similarities in their behaviour or cultural preferences with their Latvian neighbours? They will be no less or inferior Estonians over this. Tim Judah thought of “Yugosphere”, perhaps it is not the most fortunate term, but it seems to me almost equally important and symbolic as someone would call this part of Europe “the Region”.