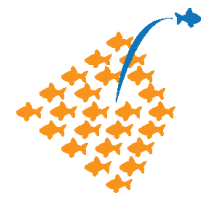


WHAT HAPPENED TO KURTI'S NEW APPROACH TO KOSOVO SERB INTEGRATION



NEW SOCIAL INITIATIVE



Although significant differences have existed between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, they have threatened to get worse as a result of Vetevendosje's electoral win and the election of Albin Kurti as Prime Minister. Not long after his swearing in, Kurti has in numerous instances referred to 'internal dialogue' as a necessary precondition to advance Kosovo's development, as well as address some of the country's most critical political obstacles. What

was signaled as a positive shift at first, was shortly overshadowed by Kurti's complete dismissal of Srpska Lista.

Sustainable integration of Kosovo Serbs remains problematic, and surely does not fit the criteria of policy issues addressed by short-term quick fixes. The basis for it requires understanding and building on a set of commonly shared perspectives on numerous

contentious topics related to inter-ethnic cooperation in Kosovo.

Safeguarding Kosovo Serb Representativeness

Kurti's dismissal of Srpska Lista as a legitimate of Kosovo Serb interests and citizens in the north and across Kosovo has largely been viewed as divisive. Srpska Lista continues to maintain a grip over public institutions in Serb-majority Municipalities, and any attempt to minimize this influence, is devoid of any practical considerations. Public institutions in Serb-majority municipalities are critical for safeguarding the basic welfare of citizens in their communities. Attempts to bypass Srpska Lista and engage with Kosovo Albanians politically risks the alienation of already struggling middle-class Kosovo Serb families.

While the prospects of the internal dialogue remain conceptual, little has been done by the new government to usher in a renewed commitment on inter-ethnic cooperation. Kosovo Serbs are yet to be approached at any level (both political and grassroots) by the government to pave the way toward any potential dialogue. Nor has government

proposed a plan for reaching out to Kosovo Serbs and consolidating their integration within the public institutions.

To compound these challenges, Kurti's character as a political leader also significantly impedes the prospects of any real change. This is not to say that Kurti is necessarily wrong, however, his figure vis-à-vis Kosovo Serbs has often been minimized to his vehement opposition to the existence of Srpska Lista. As long as Kurti continues to counter any possible cooperation with Srpska Lista, Kosovo Serbs will be reluctant to be branded co-conspirators.

Regardless of these underlying factors, proposals of potential 'sustainable' mechanisms for integration and inter-ethnic cooperation are scarce. Building on a tangible plan that reconciles these critically different political positions with prospects of 'real' integration often seems practically impossible.



Illustration: Exit news



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Perceptions of Nationalist Rhetoric

Most recently, Kurti spoke to Assembly on his wrongfully perceived 'nationalist' tendencies. In staunch defiance of such conceptions of his political compass, Kurti highlighted the distinct values between his governance and that of previous years.

His calls for the filing of a genocide suit against Serbia, however, are viewed to be along nationalist lines. This claim, without the proper legal justification and contextual background has led many to believe of him as naïve.

Additionally, it has been argued that Kurti will not realistically follow through on such commitments. It could be considered that his particular ambiguity related to this densely legal topic signifies Kurti's possible intentions. Insofar as Kurti publicly re-enforces past Vetevendosje positions during their tenure in opposition, he can continue to solidify perceptions of pulling through on commitments. Nationalist rhetoric has always been an integral part of Kosovar politics. Most if

Symbolism as a driver of Social Cohesion

The government of Kosovo is perceived to have done little in the implementation of symbolic measures to highlight its intentions in integrating communities. Although Lista Srpska has traditionally engaged in government formation, citizens have not had an opportunity to benefit from these arrangements. At the most basic level, Kosovo Serb citizens continue to face barriers to integration as a result of the lack of implementation of legal safeguards by public institutions.

Kosovo Serbs continue to face issues in equitable service provision in healthcare, education and even the practical recognition of languages. To a large extent, debates on political 'concessions' Kosovo had to adopt via the Ahtisaari Package often overshadow discussions on the implementation of equitable service provision for Kosovo Serbs. 'Symbolic' measures or signs of goodwill by the government are viewed by Kosovo Serbs to be a critical aspect in creating favorable conditions in order to facilitate the sustainable long-term integration within public institutions in Kosovo. The perceived structural discrimination of Kosovo Serbs comes as a direct result of the failure of Kosovo institutions to adhere to the minimal requirements

not all political parties in Assembly (whether in government or opposition) have continuously made use of political developments to sway public opinion against their counterparts. Vetevendosje has been often portrayed to have introduced this trend, however, it has become a consistent occurrence across political discussions in the Kosovo Assembly. As a result, most of what Kurti now says is argued by the opposition to be riddled in nationalist rhetoric.

To evaluate whether Kurti engages in nationalist rhetoric for self-interested motives remains to be seen whether he can deliver on his commitments. Judging by the extent to which the genocide suit was presented, contextualized and justified by the government, Kurti has a long way to go in convincing the public.



Illustration: Exit news

in relation to community rights. If the new government considers 'internal dialogue' to be of vital importance, it must turn to 'symbolic' measures to effectively signal this to the Kosovo Serb electorate it seeks to reach out to. Once favorable conditions and legal requirements are met, only then can the Kosovo government hold Kosovo Serbs more accountable. Until the government exercises its responsibility in line with legal benchmarks – irrespective of inaction of Kosovo Serbs- there cannot be an unfounded expectation for further integration.



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