



# Expert Reflections:

## Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue Deliberations

Dialogue  
Solutions  
Future



**1.**

The dialogue process is moribund, if not entirely dead, and has been for some time, raising the prospect of a new conflict if the EU continues on the same course.

**2.**

However, while there were calls for a reset in Brussels, there was a prevailing sense that the EU would continue to demonstrate a lack of urgency so long as there is no conflict, no matter how weak they may appear in the eyes of some.

**3.**

Belgrade is investing more in broader diplomacy around the dialogue issue to garner support for its position in Washington and within the EU, with little energy invested in finding constructive solutions.

**4.**

Normalisation continues to have different meanings to the respective parties, with fluid notions of success and failure leading to evasion and/or manipulation. The need for greater transparency and democracy in the process was voiced.

**5.**

There was a consensus that the crisis management approach must end, especially as both Belgrade and Pristina are comfortable with this format because they can avoid making decisions.

**6.**

To this end, several participants called for the EU to make dialogue genuine and unavoidable, including through a strong moderator, arguing that the spillover can help unlock the Western Balkan's EU perspective.

**7.**

While ideas such as implementation deadlines were proposed, there was skepticism about enforcement mechanisms, especially with the EU unlikely to adopt measures against Belgrade given the prevailing politics within the Union (i.e. Serbia's relations with Hungary and Slovakia).

**8**

Several participants accused Albin Kurti of taking steps outside the framework of the dialogue; an approach that it was argued plays into Serbia's hands by allowing Belgrade to claim that things have been forced upon the Kosovo Serb community (i.e. license plates, ID cards), thereby allowing it to avoid domestic scrutiny.

**9.**

There was a consensus that Serbia was content for the dialogue to proceed as slowly as possible, regardless of the Ohrid Agreement being part of Chapter 35, with several participants concerned about a 'frozen conflict'.

**10**

Several participants argued that Vucic is more transactional than Kurti but lacks a reliable partner in Pristina.

**11.**

The Kosovo Serbs, particularly those in the north, are most profoundly affected by this dynamic between Belgrade and Pristina.

**12.**

With Pristina having secured physical control of the north after Banjska, Kosovo Serbs are arguably more eager to secure the benefits afforded by the Brussels Agreement.

**13.**

However, there is still a strong sense within the Kosovo Serb community that dialogue has done little to nothing to improve their lives.

**14.**

While there was general skepticism about a viable European path, compounded by a loss of interest, one participant asserted that if Serbia's European path is permanently blocked, so is Kosovo's.

**15.**

Regionally, the potential emergence of Albania (unincumbered by internal disagreements) as the front-runner for membership could positively impact accession dynamics.

**16.**

There was broad consensus that Kurti's steps to change the reality in the north have not only undone the integration of the Kosovo Serb community but inhibited the international consolidation of Kosovo's statehood.

**17.**

There remain profound concerns about the situation in the north in the run-up to Kosovo's general elections, especially as Kurti seeks to boost his popularity and deflect discussions away from the economy and investment. The extent to which this approach has diminishing returns was considered without consensus.

**18.**

While reciprocity may have rhetorical appeal, the participants do not see it as a guiding principle of Pristina's approach to dialogue; indeed, taken to its logical end, it means not discussing issues internal to Kosovo which hasn't been the case thus far.

**19.**

There is a sense that Kurti is using the dialogue in the same manner as Vucic; namely to distract from other domestic issues, with some raising concerns about 'state capture'.

**20.**

There was consensus that Kurti's approach wouldn't change if he remained in power, with concerns expressed that Kosovo was on a monoethnic path.

**21.**

Several participants accused Kurti of abusing institutions for political ends, with attempts to humiliate Serbs for 'whistling' and 'wearing T-shirts'.

**22.**

Implementation remains problematic, not only within the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, but of the Ahtisaari Plan and Kosovo's constitution.

**23.**

If agreements remain unimplemented, civil society must consider what steps can be taken to offer something akin to a parallel process.

**24.**

One participant emphasized that community rights in Kosovo are guaranteed by international agreements (particularly the Ahtisaari Plan), hence if you ignore these precepts then you undermine the idea of Kosovo as a state.

**25.**

Though the question of the US Presidential elections looms large, several participants stressed that the situation was very different to the last Trump administration when the idea of a land swap was actively debated.

**26.**

Given global circumstances, several participants argued that Washington would have limited time for and interest in the Western Balkans, especially if there were no tangible prospects of success.

**27.**

The worst-case scenario advanced was that Washington take steps to close Bondsteel and the re-emergence of border change ideas.

**28.**

The war in Ukraine has changed considerations about Kosovo, with one view asserting that Kosovo should avoid being hostage to the war's outcome.

**29.**

One participant maintained that a strong, vibrant Kosovo Serb community was essential to counter extremist voices in Belgrade. If the community is diluted, then narratives of 'revenge' will be reinforced, further reducing the scope for reconciliation.

**30.**

Furthermore, another hypothesis was that the lack of a viable Kosovo Serb community, widely deemed one of Kurti's goals, would undermine Serbia's incentives to engage in dialogue.

**31.**

While people from all communities are leaving Kosovo - primarily due to economic factors and the quality of health/education - there was a broad consensus that emigration from the north was driven by not just a sense of fear, but of not being wanted by Pristina.

**32.**

Popular consent for the dialogue needs to be engineered in Serbia and Kosovo, however, there are false expectations about the ultimate ends/goals of dialogue.

**33.**

Nationalistic chauvinism is worse, arguably than during the war. People from Pristina who engage the Kosovo Serb community are regularly described as national traitors.

**34.**

Young people have ingrained hatred, which didn't exist during the collapse of Yugoslavia. To combat prejudices formed even before students start university, youth exchanges were encouraged for High Schools to make them more resilient to hate-based propaganda. Without these steps, deeply rooted cultural problems will become broader.

**35.**

There is also a need for Serbs in Kosovo to learn the Albanian language to facilitate institutionalized problem-solving at the local level, which is key to building trust.

**36.**

Mutual recognition of diplomas needs to be implemented in Serbia to benefit the Albanian community in the south, which also contends with passivization and non-implementation of the seven-point plan.

**37.**

For those in Pristina, it was often difficult to determine differences in the stance of the Serbian government and the (albeit fragmented) opposition where dialogue is concerned.

**38.**

However, for the opposition in Belgrade, there is no political incentive to engage on the Kosovo issue as they are excluded from the dialogue process.

**39.**

There is consensus among opposition parties on all sides that there needs to be more public and parliamentary discussion about Kosovo, but not all parties support the Ohrid Agreement.

**40.**

There was also a strong sense that the current Serbian government doesn't want to be in the EU, and is happy enough maintaining close ties.

**41.**

If Serbia is to secure EU membership, one participant insisted that it must be because of conditionality not as a reward for Kosovo.

# **Dialogue Solutions Future**



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