

Expert Reflections:

EU-facilitated Dialogue on Normalization of Relations

2nd

Deliberation/Gathering

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Current Challenges in the Normalization Process.

Participants expressed concern over the stagnation of the Kosovo-Serbia normalization process, suggesting that neither the Kosovo government nor the Serbian administration appears fully committed. One view pointed to a lack of genuine political will for normalization, with a participant suggesting a top-down approach akin to North Macedonia's Prespa Agreement as a potential solution. Others argued that both parties might be waiting for external events, such as the U.S. elections, to guide the next steps, indicating a hesitancy to lead the process independently.

Role of International Actors

Divergent views emerged about the influence of international actors. Some argued that the European Union (EU) needs stronger leadership, criticizing its reliance on U.S. support as ineffective. According to one participant, U.S. disengagement would leave the EU unable to sustain the process, a position opposed by those who believe the EU's role should be enhanced independently, particularly with potential leadership from figures like Kaja Kallas. Concerns were also raised that the U.S. has previously undermined EU-led efforts, with some participants describing past instances of "active sabotage" by the U.S., highlighting complex power dynamics in the international community's approach to the dialogue.

Vision and Structural Integration

The lack of a shared vision for the future between Kosovo and Serbia was a critical point of concern. Kosovo seeks mutual recognition, while Belgrade refuses this, leading to a situation where Kosovo Serbs feel unsupported by both Pristina and Belgrade. Some participants viewed Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti's integration efforts in the North as ineffective, citing that Serbian institutions continue to function while new Kosovo-backed institutions lack full functionality, resulting in local dependence on the Serbian system. In contrast, others argued that dismantling parallel structures is essential for long-term stability, suggesting that Kurti's approach is necessary to avoid a "frozen conflict."

Community Integration and Autonomy

The dialogue covered differing opinions on integrating Serbian communities and potential amnesty for former Kosovo Police officers who resigned. Advocates for amnesty highlighted that past regional conflicts, such as those in North Macedonia and Southern Serbia, demonstrated successful integration models where former combatants joined public service.

On the other hand, skeptics warned that amnesty without meaningful integration strategies could perpetuate dependency on Serbian structures, especially in the absence of clear support for autonomy or ASMM (Association of Serb-majority Municipalities).

Perspectives on Minority Rights

Participants noted that the EU's focus on Kosovo Serbs, while necessary, should be broadened to include other minorities, like Albanians in the Presevo Valley, who have seen limited progress since the Končulj Agreement. While some participants emphasized the EU's responsibility to uphold its commitments to minority rights across the Balkans, others argued that expanding minority inclusion might add complexity to the normalization efforts, possibly hindering progress with Kosovo Serbs.

Future Steps and Potential Impacts of External Factors

The U.S. Presidential election outcome was viewed as a potential turning point, with unanimous agreement that it could directly impact Kosovo-Serbia relations. Participants expressed hope that a decisive outcome might re-engage the U.S. in the dialogue, while others feared a shift in U.S. policy could lead to isolation and increased tension. Additionally, Kosovo's 2025 elections were seen as critical, especially for implementing ASMM and encouraging Kosovo Serb participation in local governance, with some participants warning that a failure to address ASMM would further erode trust in Pristina among northern Kosovo Serbs.

Conclusion

Despite differing perspectives, there was a consensus on the need for clear EU leadership, a more defined framework for normalization, and concerted efforts to rebuild trust with Kosovo Serbs. Participants highlighted that without these, Kosovo risks demographic shifts that could lead to further isolation of Serbian communities, ultimately challenging the region's stability and multiethnic character.

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