

Online-Discussion

Breakthrough or Stalemate?

The Prospects and Consequences of the EU Plan for Serbia and Kosovo

Organizer: Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft / SOG)

Online via Zoom, 28 March 2023

Report by Igor Antov, Munich

The topic of this digital panel discussion was the on 18 March 2023 concluded Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia. *Maja Bjeloš*, researcher at the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, *Donika Emini*, executive director at the Civikos Platform in Prishtina, and *Tatjana Lazarević*, editor-in-chief of the KoSsev portal active in North Mitrovica, discussed the latest developments between Serbia and Kosovo in the aftermath of the Ohrid Agreement, as it is also referred to. The discussion was moderated by Prof. *Florian Bieber*, Director of the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz and Board Member of the SOG. The opinions of the three speakers were to a varying extent aligned in terms of the agreement changing the atmosphere from crisis management to resolution of the conflict, with *Lazarević* going as far as naming the Ohrid deal a “fast lane” towards the expected comprehensive agreement. However, all of the speakers shared the opinion that the ongoing process lacked the involvement of civic societal actors, which apart from the formal agreements would be necessary for bringing both societies closer together.

Different responses to the March 2023 agreement were echoed by the speakers. On the one hand, the general impression in Serbia was that the people are not fully aware of the agreement’s substance and what Serbia agreed to do and implement. Although a considerable part of the population is against the proposal, it seemed that the opposition was unable to mobilize people on the street to that degree. On the other hand, the Serbs in Kosovo are said to have noticed that thanks to shuttle diplomacy a parallel negotiation process between Serbia

and Kosovo took place, while the presidents Aleksandar Vučić and Albin Kurti were publicly exchanging blows. The broad opposition in Kosovo opposes the idea of an association of Serb municipalities, calling it autonomy of the local Serbs. However, *Emini* was quick to point out the fallacy in the stance of the opposition, as it was the same party that signed the agreement with the envisioned association in 2014 in the first place.

One point of disagreement between the speakers was the question of whether the Ohrid Agreement was comprehensive or not. *Emini* was convinced that the March agreement lacked in substance and saw it as a result of the intense presence by the international community as “very disappointing”. According to *Emini*, an element of incrementalism was missing, as for Kurti and Kosovo the envisioned association would have been acceptable if it came with an official recognition. Furthermore, the fact that the idea of the association was not developed enough, or not shared with the public, puts an additional burden onto the process. On the contrary, *Lazarević* was explicit in stating that the agreement encompassed several sizable points. The fact that Serbia has obliged itself to recognize Kosovo’s national symbols and passports, as well as to refer to Kosovo without an asterisk in the agreement are steps based on which *Lazarević* described the event as a “turning point”. For Kosovo Serbs these are indicators of real substance.

Another difference in opinion was observable concerning the implementation time frame issue. While *Emini* and *Bjeloš* expressed that having a concrete time frame would have enabled

holding the politicians accountable and would thus have fostered progress, *Lazarević* opted for the long-term approach and found the lack of a concrete time frame an indecisive factor for the success of the process. She pointed out that the “negotiation dialogue process is not the industry of peace”, leaning towards the opinion that the “real” work needs to be done on the ground. However, it was also emphasized by the panellists that not having a time frame can lead to another ten years being spent without tangible progress being achieved.

An aspect that aligned the opinions of the speakers were the observed double-faced politics by both Serbia and Kosovo. *Bjeloš* highlighted the “I accepted but I did not sign”-momentum perpetuated by the Serbian side as a counter narrative to the act of reaching the March agreement. The substantial rise of antagonistic tendencies was emphasized by *Lazarević*, who stressed that the further Kurti and Vučić were advancing with the negotiations, the more frustration and hostility between the two societies rose. The two dimensions appear to be evident in this regard. For one, both leaders seem to negotiate and act in a synchronized manner, but at the same time they actively fuel hatred and cultural non-communication. *Emini* further pointed out that genuine commitment is required from both sides for sustainable progress to be possible. Six months ago, neither party had wanted to join the process, but

thanks to the efforts by the European Union (EU) and the United States a new momentum for dialogue has been set in motion. There is an inherent issue with this approach according to *Emini*, as there is no local ownership by the Balkan politicians for the Franco-German proposal. Thus, the agreement feels imposed and the responsibility to implement it is put into question.

In terms of Serbia’s short-term future, *Bjeloš* was of the opinion that Serbia will focus on internal issues in the upcoming period. She noticed that the president has already started the election campaign and that forces in Serbia intend to avoid spending energy and time in yet another unproductive negotiation. However, Serbia has not moved closer to the EU despite the agreement and in that sense needs to work on improving its rule of law and democracy principles.

Lastly, the three panellists agreed to the greatest extent on the point that the negotiation process needs to include civic societal actors from both countries. Until now, the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has only taken place on state level, with mainly politicians in the spotlight. Not enough efforts have been devoted to the coming together of people because if the agreement strives to be successful, it will have to include the human dimension into the process as well.

Podiumsdiskussion

20 Jahre nach dem Attentat – Was bleibt von Zoran Đinđić?

Veranstalter: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft/Zweigstelle Halle in Kooperation mit dem Seminar für Slavistik der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg Landesvertretung Sachsen-Anhalt, Berlin, 14. März 2023

Bericht von Željana Tunić, Halle (Saale)

Einleitung

Durch den russischen Angriff auf die Ukraine hat die Frage, ob und wie sich die Länder des westlichen Balkans in die Strukturen der Europäischen Union integrieren lassen (möchten), eine neue Dringlichkeit erhalten. Zugleich sind

die Hindernisse auf diesem Weg unverkennbar, wie insbesondere das Beispiel Serbien zeigt. Nationalistischer Populismus, die Verweigerung einer in der Gesellschaft breit wirkenden kritischen Aufarbeitung der eigenen Kriegs- und Gewaltgeschichte und schließlich das Lavieren