The future status of Kosovo

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The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia organized a two-day conference ‘The Future Status of Kosovo’ on June 13-14, 2005 in Prishtina. The conference not only stood as the third in the series of Serb-Albanian dialogues which the Committee has staged over the past eight years, but also as the final and most important segment of the US Institute for Peace-supported project ‘Belgrade-Prishtina: Steps to Build Confidence and Understanding.’ The idea behind the conference was to provide — on the eve of the announced start of negotiations on Kosovo’s status — a realistic insight into the complexity of this major regional issue.

The conference was a display of authentic discussions on reality and real problems. Regardless of many different stances, the conference participants, Serbs and Albanians alike, attempted to conceptualize a policy that is moving towards a lasting solution and regional stability. A policy, as such, implies a sober assessment of Kosovo’s reality, as well as of possibilities, problems and constraints. The two-day conference, echoing more in Prishtina and somewhat less in Belgrade, assembled a number of outstanding political and public figures from Prishtina — Albanians, Serbs and representatives from Kosovo’s other ethnic communities, all of them concerned with their own future and ready to acknowledge major changes in Kosovo society during the past six years. The same was true of the considerations of the participants from Belgrade, the people standing for Serbia’s alternative politics, and of Podgorica’s officials. Below, five of the presentations have been published. In her intervention Natasa Micic, the former acting president of the Serbian Assembly during the Djidjic period acknowledges the reality and points to the need to act promptly. She belongs to the circle representing the political alternative that advocates dialogue with Albanians, which is now being constantly marginalized by the current regime.

Latinka Perovic, a historian, and also a former political leader from 1970s, a period which was known for its reformist orientation, points out in her intervention the need for a historical agreement between Albanians and Serbs.

Agim Ceku, Commander in Chief of the KPC (Kosova Protection Corps), points out that the issue of security is their priority and thus needs to be addressed by Kosovars themselves. To this end he advocates that the KPC should be more clearly defined in order to perform its tasks appropriately.

Bajram Kosumi, the Prime Minister of Kosova, has underlined the efforts which the Kosova government is undertaking in different spheres with more or less success. However, he has indicated Belgrade’s discouraging messages to the Serbian community which generate enormous problems for the processes of

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integrating the Serb community into Kosova institutions.

Representatives of the international community and the regional neighbors Macedonia and Croatia also took part in the conference and creatively contributed to the exchange of views. The key international players were clear that the start of the talks concerning Kosovo’s future status is on the international agenda for this year. And now it is up to political leaders and institutions to demonstrate that they aim to build a stable, tolerant, multiethnic and democratic society in Kosovo, a society in which all communities will be living together in peace and in peace with their neighbors. It is time for all sides to abandon short-lived politics, to join in a dialogue about real problems in good faith, with passion and constructiveness, and to take all the measures that we know are necessary. This conference is a good start in the right direction. We need more such dialogue, said Soren Jessen-Petersen, the UN Secretary-General Special Representative, who addressed the conference.


The first panel, ‘Kosovo in the Context of Regional Stability’, chaired by Professor Enver Hasani, discussed key security aspects, the role of Kosovo’s future army under civilian control, regional security challenges not only in the event of Kosovo’s independence, but also of Montenegro’s, and the state of affairs in Kosovska Mitrovica as a major problem to be solved, etc.

‘The unconditional safety of minority communities is a key standard preconditioning stability and the pace of solving the future status of Kosovo,’ concluded, inter alia, the second panel entitled ‘Minorities and International Standards in Kosovo’, chaired by the lawyer Azem Vllasi. The discussion also highlighted that the return of all displaced persons and refugees was a priority task for all Kosovo institutions. As for Kosovo Serbs, their integration into Kosovo society, as many put it, is their right, the same as their right to live safely in their homes is a fundamental human right without any alternative solution whatsoever.

According to Vera Markovic, who chaired the third panel: ‘Decentralization and its Implications in Kosovo,’ the discussion that resembled a parliamentary debate indicated that political power was being gradually institutionalized. ‘It is most encouraging that different positions on the decentralization plan do not divide the political sphere into Serbian and Albanian parts, but into groupings that include both Albanian and minority parties … I would say that the debate on decentralization testifies that Kosovo society obviously endeavors to abandon the issues related to ‘outer freedom’ or freedom from domination and to come to grips with the question of ‘inner freedom’ that cannot but benefit all minorities, ethnic and political alike’, said Vera Markovic.

What marked the panel ‘Post-Conflict Rehabilitation’, but the entire conference as well, was the stance that the position of minorities was a measure of any society’s democratic potential. In this context, as Dr. Olga Popovic-Obradovic