

THE STRATEGY WITHOUT A STRATEGY



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Introduction

The strategy for northern Kosovo later changed and renamed as the “comprehensive approach” created lots of noise when published early this year as a document that will improve lives of all of those that live in the northern Kosovo. The news were welcomed by everyone in Kosovo, given that for over a decade since the end of war in Kosovo, the northern part remains out of Prishtina sovereignty and under a strong control of Belgrade.

But four months after the pomposity of the document presentation, the document remains hopeless and does not seem to be wanted by anyone. The International Civilian Office, where the roots of the document still known with its first name “The Strategy for North” remain, has failed to provide much of international support for the document and has realized that the process of changing the situation in the north is more complicated than it seemed at first.

Strategy rejections were manifested from the first days of its promotion and they continue to remain strong. The only factors that in reality have the capacity to alter issues on the ground, unfortunately have maintained their distance to this document by refusing any commitment towards its implementation.

The Kosovo Government, which has ignored the problem of north since the violence escalation of 2008, appeared to be more or less surprised when they were attributed the authority of the document for northern Kosovo. All what the government has done so far is appointing Mr. Ylber Hysa as the Coordinator of the Strategy.

The greatest achievement of the strategy seems to be the fact that it has spread light over the existing gap among the international figures for Kosovo; as well as the lack of interest and consequently the lack of a proper strategy of Kosovo

institutions for the issue of north. This seems to be the main problem of the affliction of northern Kosovo. And now when there is warnings for talks between Prishtina and Belgrade, the risk of recognition of the partition which has been constructed for 11 years now in northern Kosovo, is becoming more obvious.

Prishtina should seriously consider the warnings for new negotiations and prepare for all possible scenarios. The international community so far has strongly objected the partition of Kosovo therefore Prishtina should use this support to promote ideas on how to keep Kosovo undivided and how to integrate the entire territory of the country under Prishtina sovereignty. Prishtina should seek to change the situation on the ground in the north before entering into any new negotiations with Belgrade¹. More precisely, Prishtina authorities should persist and convince international supporters that they will not enter into negotiations before law and order is established in northern part of Kosovo.

Belgrade so far has a key role in northern Kosovo, continuously violating the Security Council Resolution 1244 and Kosovo documents that guarantee integrity and sovereignty of the country. Serbia has the silent support of some EU countries that feel they should support Serbia's president Boris Tadic and his party DS² in taking the lead even among the Kosovo Serbs. An illustration of this is the permission given to Serbia to hold elections in Kosovo territory in order for Tadic's DS to replace other parties from Serbia in Kosovo illegal institutions.

¹ From diplomatic sources.

² DS (Demokratska Stranka - Democratic Party).



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Cargos entering Kosovo from Serbia are only registered and then it is the suppliers' choice whether they want to custom their goods or not, since the border crossings between Serbia and Kosovo has no customs officers yet

Background

For more than a decade, northern part of Kosovo has remained outside of Prishtina jurisdiction. Neither UNMIK nor the government institutions in Prishtina have established law and order in this part of Kosovo. At first glance, this part seems to be controlled by Belgrade through its structures, mainly security. But, it is more accurate to say that north is controlled by criminal groups operating under a high degree of autonomy from Belgrade who are not accountable to anyone for their actions. These groups control the entire political and economical life in the three municipalities in northern Kosovo - Zvečan, Zubinpotok and Leposavic, but also in the northern part of the city of Mitrovica.

Even international officials who have served in the mission in this part of Kosovo last ten years acknowledge this fact. Furthermore, even Serbian citizens living in this part of Kosovo are viewed by many internationals as hostages to such networks of organized crime.

Activities of these groups, according to sources from Kosovo Police, include all possible criminal activities, not excluding smuggling of people and goods.

March 2000 marks two years since this part of Kosovo does not have formally functional courts, at least not Kosovar courts. Cargos entering Kosovo from Serbia are only registered and then it is the suppliers' choice whether they want to custom their goods or not, since the border crossings between Serbia and Kosovo has no customs officers yet.

The city of Mitrovica remains divided in the worst way possible, so it is nearly impossible to move from south to north or vice versa. The city was divided immediately after the entry of peacekeeping troops in Kosovo. The division was supported even by KFOR, justified by preventing inter-ethnic clashes, they placed barbed wire fences on the

main bridge in town and by doing so they kept the city divided. Unfortunately the situation created in 1999 continued to layer for many years to come, finding its supporters gradually. Intervention in the north was not possible because a contingent of at least one state with an important role in this part did not take orders to fight Serbian parallel structures in the north³. But the separation of ethnic groups in the city did not bring peace and stability. On the contrary, the division has preserved the old animosities and left little room for improvement.

Hostilities have often escalated resulting with fatalities. In the first week of February 2000, a wave of violence spread in northern part of the city when 7 people died and 4,500 Albanians were forced to abandon their homes and seek salvation in the southern part of town. The riots began after a UNHCR bus carrying ethnic Serbs was attacked with grenade launchers when two people were killed and five others were wounded. But the gravest were the riots of March 2004 which spread throughout Kosovo. After a story in the evening of 16 March 2004, that three children were drowned in the river in village of Çabër while fleeing from Serbs who were chasing them, in the morning of March 17 violent demonstrations burst in southern part. Riots spread across Kosovo, causing 19 deaths, 4000 displaced, mostly Serbian citizens from all over Kosovo, and hundreds of homes and religious buildings destroyed

Organized crime, trafficking and smuggling have complemented every report from Mitrovica. The presence of paramilitary units, backed by Belgrade is mentioned all the time. But Mitrovica has become a safe heaven for Albanian criminals and smugglers as well. UNMIK and now EULEX has never managed

³ NATO Military Sources.

to put the situation under control in Mitrovica. Indeed, it is only Serbia that has accomplished to increase its authority in this part of Kosovo.

Situation today: The need for change

After the declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, Serb inhabitants of northern Kosovo apart from protesting for a month in northern part of Mitrovica, attacked and torched two border crossings between Kosovo and Serbia and forced out Kosovo judges and police officers from the north. In March 2008 UNMIK tried to get control of the District Court in Mitrovica and other institutions of rule of law but faced resistance from Serb extremists. Attacks by extremists killed two people, a French soldier and a Ukrainian police officer. No one has been held responsible to date for these murders. Since then the northern part of Kosovo has been without order and without law.

Since the declaration of independence, there is more and more talks about Belgrade wanting to partition Kosovo and take for them the part north of Ibar River. Although this is not officially revealed as Belgrade's politics, it is obvious that Serbia stepped out on the ground to expand its presence and control over this part of Kosovo, perhaps calculating that if Serbia is forced to accept the reality on the ground - an independent Kosovo - Serbia will then also ask for the reality on the ground to be accepted, that Serbia controls northern part of Kosovo. Serbia has taken in control the network of electricity distribution in northern part of Kosovo and has appointed judges to the courts which are illegal but they are the only ones operating in this part of Kosovo.

As a consequence, even after the declaration of independence and entry into force of the Ahtisaari package along with the diminution of the role of UNMIK throughout Kosovo, the Kosovo institutions

are not able to extend their authority in this part. Government officials do not ever travel in the three municipalities in northern Kosovo, whereas the only time they visit northern part of Mitrovica is during their election campaigns. Furthermore, during the elections Kosovo's political parties do not compete at all with candidates in the three municipalities in the north⁴.

Even internationals are not much different than Kosovo institutions. KFOR has the most noticeable presence in northern Kosovo and this presence is not contested by anyone. But at the same time, since KFOR is not here to do police work, they don't even fight against the so many criminal groups or Serbian illegal institutions operating in north. In the meantime, KFOR commander, Lieutenant General Marcus Bentler, has stated even publicly that KFOR will not intervene against parallel institutions as long as they do not directly threaten Kosovo security.

The most important office for the mission in Mitrovica is the ICO office, originating from their head office in Prishtina, and established following the Ahtsaari's plan. However, the ICO shows presence only in southern part of Mitrovica, while failing to extend its presence in north. ICO's attempts to stretch to north are faced with violence by Serb extremists. ICO, had even rented a building in the northern city with the objective of operating as a head office for Mitrovica, nevertheless they never made it to northern part. Moreover, the national staff of Serb ethnicity does not show at work often because they are threatened by radical Serbs.

EULEX has no noticeable presence in the northern part of town either.

⁴ Main reason for this may be the fact that there are few Kosovar Albanians that live in the three northern municipalities.

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In the autumn of 2009 ICO officials, encouraged by the new U.S. ambassador in Kosovo, Christopher Dell, had initiated a strategy to stop the Serbian offensive in northern Kosovo.

EULEX has adopted a strategy of slow but secure expansion in northern Kosovo. The presence of EULEX in Kosovo is a result of acceptance of the so-called "Six points plan" which was required to be implemented by Serbia. EULEX so far has a modest presence in the two customs posts between Kosovo and Serbia destroyed by Serb extremists during the protest held a month after the declaration of independence in March 2008 and the District Court in northern Mitrovica which is not operational since March 2008 when the same was under attack by Serbian extremists.

UNMIK has taken a very passive and secondary role in northern Kosovo since the departure of UNMIK administrator for the region of Mitrovica, Gerard Gallucci. UNMIK has attempted to mediate in the dispute over the reconstruction of Albanian homes in the neighborhood of Kroi i Vitakut in the village of Suhodoll, but even in this case they did not play a major role.

As for Kosovo institutions they remain almost invisible in the north. In northern part of Mitrovica there was a proliferation of municipal involvement during the second mandate of governance of Mr. Bajram Rexhepi (2007-2009). The greatest achievement was the reconstruction of homes of Albanian inhabitants in the neighborhood of Kroi i Vitakut but also the free movement of Serb residents from the northern part to the south, such as visits to Orthodox cemetery in the south.

However, the engagement of all actors in Kosovo is by far incomparable with the commitment of Serbian government which keeps this part of Kosovo under a firm control.

This constellation has convinced some international representatives in Prishtina that something has to be done in order to stop the drive of Serbia in extending its powers to the northern Kosovo and Kosovo institutions have to undertake some steps as a counter response to such Serbian actions.

In the autumn of 2009 ICO officials, encouraged by the new U.S. ambassador in Kosovo, Christopher Dell, had initiated a strategy to stop the Serbian offensive in north and to elevate the engagement of national and international institutions in this part. The document "leaked" to the public in January 2010 and became known as the "Strategy for north" which was drafted during late 2009 and early 2010 by ICO officials. ICO had introduced Kosovo Government as a partner in developing the strategy but later ICO claimed sole authorship of the document.

This document was supported by ICO officials, U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Mr. Christopher Dell, and Kosovo government, but the document was criticized by some ambassadors to Kosovo. Kosovo's political opposition and civil society expressed their doubts regarding the realistic capacity of implementation of this strategy.

Reserved about the strategy was also International Steering Group which is the highest international structure that supports the development of the independent state of Kosovo and it is the highest authority that also initiated the authority of ICO. There is information that foreign ministers of some member states of ISG expressed their frustration for not being consulted by ICO while drafting the document. Consequently the document was barely approved by ISG when published.

What does “Strategy for north” contain

“Comprehensive approach” was examined at a conference organized by the Club for Foreign Policy, where supporters and opponents presented their views on the document. The conference took place on February 23, 2010, in Prishtina, and senior international and national representatives participated.

Kosovo government representative, Deputy Prime Minister Hajredin Kuçi, stated in the conference that “the strategy is one of the priorities of Kosovo Government”. He reported on the four pillars that the “strategy” is built on: strengthening of rule of law, decentralization and establishment of northern municipality, holding elections and establishing legitimate institutions in municipalities in the north and the improvement of socio-economic situation of its citizens. Deputy Prime Minister Kuçi urged support for this project, especially by international actors. He particularly inquired the engagement of KFOR and EULEX and “the steps of execution of the strategy”.

At the conference, Deputy Prime Minister Kuçi announced that Kosovo government will establish “working groups” to implement the strategy where government, opposition, civil society and community representatives will be engaged.

International Civilian Representative, Mr. Pieter Feith, head of the mission that prepared the document, also strongly supported the “comprehensive approach”. At the same conference organized by CFP, Mr. Feith explained that “the status quo in north is not sustainable” and should be addressed. He acknowledged that “the situation in north will not change easily and quickly” and urged that “expectations should be reasonable”.

Inviting Belgrade, as the main factor in the north, to “leave (politics) of confrontation” and adopt “cooperation”, he recalled that the need for regional cooperation is one of the most important

points on the path to stabilization and association in the EU, implying that Serbia can not aim the EU if Serbia is not constructive with its neighbors. About the strategy, Mr. Feith said that its goal is not confrontation (with Serbia), but improving living conditions for Serbian citizens of northern Kosovo. Mr. Feith also stated that “this is not an ICO document, but a Kosovo Government (document).” “It is a Government document prepared in consultation with us and it is the government’s duty to take greater responsibility in the implementation,” said Mr. Feith.

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The senior representative of EU expressed his support for territorial integrity of Kosovo and affirmed that the document aims to confirm and protect the integrity of Kosovo. “The Government, as it should be, thinks that territorial integrity of Kosovo should be protected” he said and added that he supports this position as an

International Civilian Office representative, and he can say this on behalf of ISG also. Recalling that “the phenomenon of parallel structures is unfortunate feature on the political scene” and “even though they are violating the Resolution 1244, which SRSG himself has declared, they are also a problem for the government.”

ICO chief seemed aware of the obstacles in implementing the plan, especially the success of this project depending on the acceptance of the document by Serbian citizens of Kosovo. “It will take time because this will not be a matter of days and months but rather months and years,” said Mr. Feith, elaborating that “what will determine the pace and schedule of work is the acceptance by local residents. If the population in the north would like the ideas we offer them and what EU represents - values, principles, perspectives offered by EU, then everything will go well. If there are other views, we will need to review and learn what the views and the preferences are.” Speaking about Belgrade, he said “so far Belgrade’s response has not been so positive” but, he added, “Hopefully it will change”. “It is not as much about the status, it is more about the stabilization and association, Brussels will communicate with Belgrade during this journey and ask to see the support and encouragement from Serbia for this activity.”

Another great supporter of the project is the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Mr. Christopher Dell. He prefers the document to be called “comprehensive approach” and not be known by a military term “strategy”. At the conference of “the Club for Foreign Policy”, Ambassador Dell said the “comprehensive approach” represents a break from the paradigm of the past decade and represents a new page of dynamic approach towards north of Kosovo.

Ambassador explained that the

starting points of the strategy are the two documents that are accepted by all, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and Ahtisaari’s comprehensive proposal. “Resolution 1244 is important because it recognizes the territorial integrity of Kosovo and the end of the administrative role of Serbia on the territory of Kosovo,” he said. And even “if you accept Ahtisaari’s plan or not, if you agree that there is an independent state (Kosovo) or not, or if UNMIK still rules here, as some countries want to say, everyone must recognize the two fundamental points of the Resolution 1244: End of the role of Serbian state and territorial integrity of Kosovo”, said Ambassador Dell.

He stated that the role of comprehensive approach is to solve the remaining issues from the past, opening new perspectives for regional cooperation and regional unity in the context of EU structures and in addition the Euro-Atlantic structures.

Speaking of Belgrade, the US ambassador to Kosovo said that “although the first reaction from Belgrade was negative, sometimes even hysteric, in fact this represents the end of the old way of thinking.”

“We are helping both, Serbia and Kosovo, to resolve these issues and move toward a future of cooperation. We hope that Belgrade will face the legacy of the Nineties, which Serbia has not done yet, to solve this, to overcome it and move toward a different future”, Ambassador Dell said.

There were opposing opinions by other speakers at the conference. The Italian Ambassador to Kosovo, Mr. Michael Giffoni, who is appointed also by EU as a facilitator for northern Kosovo, rejected the option for the document to be treated as an EU document. Addressing mostly the previous speakers of the conference, he said “comprehensive approach is not an EU document” and added “it’s easy to

realize that this is not an EU document because EU documents are prepared by EU institutions in Brussels, undergo a certain procedure and finally get approved by the 27 members and represent the admittance of the document as a document or a strategy of the EU. Of course, this is not the case with the Strategy document”.

He said that some objectives of the “Strategy” are concurrent with the EU objectives in northern Kosovo, but he clarified that EU has its own plans for Kosovo and its northern part. “EU has stressed the need to increase the visibility and credibility in the north, in other words, its role in northern Kosovo”, said the Italian ambassador explaining that this view was articulated in Brussels” months before the idea (strategy)”.

Speaking of the concurrent points of “Strategy” and Brussels’ objectives, he stressed the importance of stability of the entire Kosovo territory and regional cooperation.

He acknowledged that “when the situation is analyzed in the entire territory of Kosovo, it is clear that there are many reasons for concern in north - concerns for lack of rule of law, concerns for the economy and social situation, and therefore great concerns for communities integration and this is one of the elements of stabilization we want to achieve”.

According to Ambassador Giffoni EU “has set some initial lines of action, the first to achieve effective EU presence in north, with the participation of all mechanisms of EU in Kosovo and to establish the EU House and then promote values and attitudes of EU in north using the steps taken so far. The commission has taken many initiatives, especially by funding projects in social and economic sphere and numerous bilateral contributions of many EU members”.

Exploring areas where EU could co-ordinate its steps with the “strategy”, the

Italian ambassador said that this could be done in “steps for decentralization and the establishment of a new municipality in the north”.

Blerim Shala, who spoke at the CFP conference in the capacity of a former negotiator of the status issue, noted that the problem of “Strategy” is not the content, but its implementation.

He compared the document with a excellent menu of a excellent restaurant, but where a customer waits for hours and after hours someone approaches and tells the customer that there are no waiters, cooks, nor supplies therefore whatever is in the menu is useless, indicating the lack of support for the document by main actors of security in Kosovo.

What’s good in this document, Shala said, is the opening of debate by Kosovo society, between national and international factors, within the national factor itself, about the northern Kosovo issue that was left out since Kosovo became a state, “even though it is a typical example of rejection of resolution 1244, constitutional and legal order, KFOR and EULEX mission”.

“However,” Mr. Shala continued, “we have realized that KFOR and EULEX have nothing to do with the ‘comprehensive approach’ and today we understand that EU does not stand behind the document either”. Mr. Shala mentioned that although it is anticipated that Belgrade would at least be neutral in the process of implementation of the Strategy, “in fact Belgrade, the creator of the status in the north, will not be cooperative”.

“The absence of these four, KFOR, EULEX, EU and Belgrade, makes us skeptical,” Mr. Shala said. As a conclusion, Mr. Shala stated that “I am frightened that (The Strategy) will remain a wish list,” and added that “implementation is the key to its success, not its content”.

Ilir Deda, Executive Director of KIPRED, was just as skeptical on the probability of

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the strategy implementation. Mr. Deda, observing the lack of EU support for the document, stated that European countries have a different objective, to strengthen the position of the current president of Serbia, Boris Tadic, in north as well (in relation to other Serbian parties that operate in the north) in order to then negotiate with Tadic for the situation in the north. In support of his claim, Mr. Deda mentioned the EU willingness for its presence in Kosovo and in allowing the elections organized by the Republic of Serbia in Kosovo territory. Speaking about the chances of the document to be accepted by Serbian citizens living in northern Kosovo, he said that “the Serb population in north can not embrace such a plan while they are threatened every day by members of Belgrade security forces”.

Some no and some yes

The comprehensive approach, however, seems to be rejected more than supported. Since the beginning, Brussels not only has distanced itself from the document but has openly opposed it. Ambassador of Spain to Belgrade was the first one, right after the document publication, to declare for the media in Belgrade that the document is not an EU document and it is not supported by EU.

In Kosovo, the Italian Ambassador, Mr. Michael Giffoni, has never supported the strategy, in contrary, he continued to implement EU plans, which were not presented to the public opinion of Kosovo. Among these plans, on 25 March 2010, Ambassador Giffoni joined by Mr. Kjartan BJORNSSON - head of Operational Sector in the Liaison Office of the European Commission, and head of EULEX, Mr. Ives de Kermabon, introduced to journalists “The EU House”. EU House is located in the building of Kosovo Police, next to the District Court where there is no

Kosovar judges since Kosovo declared its independence. In an interview for Koha Ditore⁵, Ambassador Giffoni explaining the role of this office, said that “‘The EU House’ aims to promote EU plan for northern Kosovo”, which according to the ambassador is the same like in other parts of Kosovo, and that is “building stability and prosperity for the inhabitants”. Moreover, the ambassador said that this office will be open to cooperation with all, not excluding the illegal Serb institutions operating in the north which contradicts with the “comprehensive approach” which aims to eliminate those illegal institutions. One reason why Ambassador Giffoni does not feel part of the “strategy” is perhaps the fact that the man of EU for the north has not been consulted at all by the compilers of the strategy during the drafting of this document. Ambassador Giffoni has only seen the document when this document was presented to the ‘Quint’ ambassadors in Prishtina.

The plan has also been criticized by opposition parties and non-governmental organizations in Kosovo. According to the opposition parties, the “strategy” is not a serious plan, but a bunch of good wishes for the north, without a proper strategy on how to achieve the objectives that the document includes. After the appointment of Mr. Ylber Hysa as a coordinator for the northern strategy, AAK, as the main opposition party, reacted by classifying this as another example of a government that is not serious about the issue and the reason for appointing a non-political person is that the PDK government does not want to be responsible for the failure of this project.

“Even several months after the strategy for the north was drafted, there are no results whatsoever in that part of the country,” stated Burim Ramadani, secretary general of AAK, at a press

⁵ KOHA Ditore, 29 March 2010

conference held on March 2, 2010⁶.

"For AAK, this is completely unacceptable and a waste of time. This is only to manipulate the public opinion, consequently harming Kosovo endlessly," he said. Ramadani assessed that the institutional leaders, by appointing people outside the institutions, try not to be responsible for the issue. "They try not to be held responsible for major failures that have occurred over the past two consecutive years in terms of law enforcement, thus appointing people outside the institutions to deal with the issue of the north."

Even the UN has expressed concerns for the "strategy". UN does not openly oppose the "strategy" but conveys fears that after this document is refused by Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs, the efforts of implementing the project could raise tensions in northern Kosovo. UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, said that he is concerned of the possibility of tensions in northern Kosovo⁷ and asked the Government of Kosovo to be vigilant in implementing this project. Lamberto Zannier head of UN mission in Kosovo, has also asked for caution in its implementation. Elaborating the position of his boss for Radio Free Europe, the spokesman of this mission, Russell Geekie said that the SRSg calls for the issue of northern Kosovo not to be politicized and "focus on practical issues, since practical issues help all communities and facilitate the achievement of an agreement by all parties."⁸

Important security institutions in Kosovo that would play an essential role in efforts of the "Strategy" implementation - KFOR and EULEX explicitly indicated that they are not part of the "Strategy" and

will not have a role in implementing this project.

KFOR Commander, Lieutenant General Marcus Bentler, said several times publicly that KFOR has not been engaged in the "strategy" drafting, nor will they get engaged in its implementation. "We do not have a role in implementing that strategy. We have not been part of its drafting," he said in an interview for Voice of America, in February 2010.⁹

EULEX also is reserved about this document, although they admitted that they were consulted during its preparation. "This is not an EU strategy, though we have been consulted on this draft, along with other partners," said EULEX spokeswoman Limdal Karin, for the newspaper Koha Ditore.¹⁰

Belgrade and its officials in Kosovo are still the biggest opponents of this plan. Oliver Ivanovic, Secretary of State in the "Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija" in the Serbian Government, has said bluntly that "Serbia will not accept Faith's strategy" as he called it. "Serbia will stand behind its institutions,"¹¹ he said. Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic called the "Strategy" a provocation. "Provoking warnings by illegal institutions in Prishtina, and illegal international organizations such as the so-called International Civilian Office, are something that can not bring security and stability of the situation on the ground, what we all are seeking," Jeremic said after the work for drafting the "Strategy" for

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6 KOHA Ditore, 3 March 2010

7 "Caution in the north", Express, 8 prill 2010, page 5

8 "UNMIK expresses scepticism about the Strategy for north", REL, 21 April 2010

9 "Bentler: We are not part of Strategy for Northern Kosovo", VOA, 11 February 2010

10 "EULEX does not identify with Strategy for North", KOHA Ditore, 22 January 2010

11 "Ivanovic: Serbia will not accept Faith's strategy", Blic, 24 January 2010



One of the most frequent criticisms made of the document “Strategy for North” or “Comprehensive Approach” is that the document is flimsy because it contains only a list of wishes of how the situation in the north should be...

north” was made public.¹² Serbian officials have continued to reject the “Strategy” in all international forums all the way to the UN Security Council.

On the other hand, the drafters of the “General Approach” defend their document from criticism, saying that their project did not intend to change the situation in the north in a short time. This message was affirmed by ICO chief Pieter Feith, in the conference organized by CFP mentioned above. However, the same is stated by ICO officials that participated in the strategy drafting. In talks with CFP, they explain that it was important to start a process to move things forward and that the authors

¹² “Jeremic: Strategija za sever Kosova provokacija”, Press, 10 January 2010

of the document have been aware that the implementation will be a longer process.

The coordinator of the Strategy for north, Mr. Ylber Hysa, is also positive about this project. Although he would like to see more support by national and international institutions in his commitment, he claims that things have somehow moved forward. Coordinator Hysa says that during the three months from the time he was appointed in the post, he has managed to find corridors to penetrate to the north and get support and cooperation in non-political projects. Among the successes he mentions the continuity of reconstruction of the houses for returnees in Kroi i Vitakut neighborhood in the northern part of town and the decision to subsidize the 100 hectares of arable land in the north.

How realistic is the strategy

One of the most frequent criticisms made of the document “Strategy for North” or “Comprehensive Approach” is that the document is flimsy because it contains only a list of wishes of how the situation in the north should be, without identifying the steps to be taken to achieve that situation.

The document has only 10 pages and it begins with a brief summary of the current situation and the need to act. Latter it includes 33 different recommendations for EULEX, Kosovo Government and International Actors in Kosovo on what should be done to change the circumstances in this part of the country. These recommendations are barely anything more than what has been said before or description of duties for the institutions mentioned in this document that should anyhow carry them out. Establishment of a new municipality in northern Mitrovica, improvement of governance in municipalities in northern Kosovo, or improvement of the rule of law in northern Kosovo are duties that should anyhow be accomplished, without having

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—MEMLI KRASNIQI

to compile new documents or strategies.

The strategy has also failed to align on the same side the main actors that have the capacity to influence the developments in northern Kosovo. By not including Kosovo Serbs in projects, the strategy has turned them against this document. Kosovo Serbs living in northern part of the country are threatening to obstruct any attempt of implementation of “strategy for north” in the part where they live.

KFOR and EULEX, as two major security actors in the country, have also been left out during the drafting of the document and are not obligated to engage in its implementation. Moreover, a French official said to CFP that not a single life of a French soldier or police officer - which is the biggest security force responsible for northern Kosovo - would be endangered in implementing the “Strategy for north”.

International Civilian Office (ICO) is being silent and speaks less about the Strategy, leaving it to Kosovo Government. Furthermore, ICO now presents the “Strategy” as a document that was drafted by the Government of Kosovo.

Even Kosovo government does not seem at all committed in efforts to implement the strategy. So far

the government has made only one appointment - Mr. Ylber Hysa as a Coordinator of the Strategy - but they have not appointed the working groups they had promised to assign. Deputy Prime Minister Hajredin Kuqi had committed to establish the Working Group in the abovementioned CFP conference KPJ's, held on February 23, 2010 but the working groups have not been established yet. On April 5, 2010, speaking for the newspaper Koha Ditore, Kosovo government spokesman, Mr. Memli Krasniqi, said that “they (the working groups) are being constituted. In the coming weeks they will be completed and they will proceed with concrete work in each field”. At the end of May, the Working Groups have not yet been established.

In the meantime, warnings for new talks between Kosovo and Serbia are increasing day by day. Diplomatic sources criticize Kosovo authorities for not preparing for these new circumstances, while Belgrade is getting highly prepared for the day when the international community will demand from Prishtina to sit at the table of talks with Belgrade.

Conclusions

Greatest success of the “Strategy” is that has shed light on the divisions that exist among the actors that play a role in developments in Kosovo and in the non-seriousness of the approach towards north of their Kosovo. Moreover, the “Strategy” has highlighted the need for having a proper strategy on how to change the situation in north. The strategy will contain more than descriptions of how the situation is now and how it should be. It would also outline concrete steps to be taken to change the situation and identify the players that will take these steps. All the factors that play a role in northern part of Kosovo should get involved in the strategy drafting and the same to remain committed to its implementation.

Warnings for new negotiations between Prishtina and Belgrade, that are beginning to be supported by several European countries, make the need for a strategy in Prishtina even more urgent in drafting a strategy with clear directions of what should be done with the north. Such a strategy should provide vision for the future so that Prishtina has the primary role in the dispute for north. By being creative and visionary, Prishtina will impose itself as the main actor in the north. So far, unfortunately, the main role is played by Belgrade whereas the steps taken by Kosovo Government, such as efforts to extend its authority over the network of electricity distributors in the northern part or to cease the work of illegal mobile operators, has made the lack of authority of Prishtina more obvious in being a player in the north.

Prishtina should seriously consider the warnings for new negotiations and prepare for all possible scenarios. Prishtina needs to develop its platform for talks with Serbia about normalization of relations between the two countries. The international community so far has

indicated strongly against the partition of Kosovo and Prishtina should use this support to promote ideas on how to keep Kosovo as a whole and how will integrate the entire territory under the sovereignty of Prishtina. More specifically, Prishtina should demand the change of situation on the ground in the north before they enter any negotiations with Belgrade. The authorities in Prishtina have to insist and convince the international supporters that they will not enter into negotiations before law and order would function in the northern part of Kosovo.

The decision of the International Court of Justice is increasingly seen as the point after which negotiations can be expected between Kosovo and Serbia. Prishtina seems too casual at this point, as if it is convinced that ICJ decision would not be detrimental for Kosovo. However, authorities in Prishtina should prepare better for any possible ICJ decision and for the repercussions of this decision, especially on the issue of new negotiations and the position of northern Kosovo.

An obstacle to the mobilization of more actors in favor of the change of situation in the north, in favor of Prishtina, could also be the failure of diplomatic battle in recognizing Kosovo. Rejections of statehood even by EU countries may also reflect in limiting the potential for mobilization and unification of relevant players in improving the situation in the north.

At this time, Serbia has the advantage in the “game” in northern Kosovo. They control the situation on the ground and manipulate with the lack of Western unity for Kosovo. This way Serbia is managing to dictate terms of the game by keeping Kosovo hostage and by doing so finding a faster path towards European integrations. Belgrade has intensified its engagement in the northern part of Kosovo and does not appear ready for a change. Most flagrant

violation of Kosovo's efforts to extend its authority throughout its territory is taking place on May 30, 2010, when Serbia will hold local elections in municipalities of northern Kosovo, by directly violating the Security Council Resolution 1244 which they call upon so often. Serbia day by day is strengthening its control of the north and Prishtina does not seem to be able to respond to this.

No one can deny the fact that one of the key factors is the international community. Divisions among international actors, particularly between EU countries, have extended the status quo in the north, and this division was clearly seen in the approach towards the "Strategy for north". In addition, some EU countries seem to be willing not only to support the idea of new negotiations but are ready to consider options to change or "add to" the Ahtisaari Package. There are voices in Brussels that claim that since Kosovo Albanians have won their independence, they should be happy now, whereas now it is the time to please Serbia also.¹³ Some European officials have already measured the pulse by stating that Serbs in Kosovo, more precisely those living in northern Kosovo, should be given a special status. Vice-President of Social Democrats in the European Parliament, Hannes Swoboda, said that Kosovo issue could be resolved if the Serbs in northern Kosovo would be granted a status similar to the status that the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina had won with the Dayton Agreement.¹⁴

But not all international actors are willing to explore these options. United States, which remains the country with the most influence in Kosovo and Kosovo issue in general, are strongly against the



partition of Kosovo. An American analyst, speaking on condition of anonymity, characterized the behavior of some European countries as Serbo-centric, and reiterated that the division of Kosovo would be a bad choice not only for Kosovo but for the entire Balkan region. But Washington now faces other bigger problems and Kosovo does not appear often in the agenda of U.S. priorities.

It is up to Prishtina to take initiative and show that it has vision, ideas, potential and political will to change the situation in the north. This will be the only remedy saving Kosovo from partition or from other ideas that divide Kosovo politically by keeping hostage parts of its territory and by keeping Kosovo politically crippled.

¹³ Ilir Deda, Director of KIPRED, CFP Conference about Strategy for North, 23 February 2010.

¹⁴ "Swoboda: For Serbs in Kosovo status like in B&H", KOHA Ditore, 13 May 2010.

THE STRATEGY WITHOUT A STRATEGY

The Foreign Policy Club is a non-governmental organization which brings together intellectuals, politicians and prominent civil society activists that show affinity in foreign policy. The Club aims to contribute through intellectual debates and recommendations with regard to generating Kosovo's foreign policy in the function of peace in Kosovo, the region and the world. The Club generates debate, examines developments and gives recommendations for Kosovo's foreign policy; focuses in examining global trends that affect Kosovo's daily political-economics, and also researches Kosovo's opportunities for integrating in the world. The Club strives to draw attention to world debates and the necessary steps for Kosovo's politics in relation to such developments. Through its activities and intensive debate, the Club produces recom-

mendations and programs regarding regional, European and global integration processes, particularly in the process of EU and NATO integration, which fall upon the institutions of Kosovo.

The organization's special focus is to develop a debate regarding immediate actions that Kosovo Institutions need to undertake in the diplomatic sphere, such as Kosovo's recognition from UN members states and Kosovo's acceptance in international organizations, as the UN, EC, OSCE, World Bank, IMF, Organization of Islamic Conferences, Olympic Committee etc.

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