

CEAS POLICY BRIEF

YOUR FACE SOUNDS FAMILIAR

REGARDING THE USE OF PUBLIC PROPERTY IN THE “CLEANSING” OF
NORTHERN KOSOVO OF ELECTION MATERIAL, AND SOME OTHER
SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO THE UPCOMING LOCAL
ELECTIONS IN KOSOVO



CENTER FOR EURO – ATLANTIC STUDIES, NOVEMBER 2013.

The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS) calls upon Serbian officials to pay attention and state their position on the use of public property in the action of “cleansing Northern Kosovo” from election materials for the upcoming local elections in Kosovo, which has been carried out on October 28, 2013 by “self-organized citizens”, as stated in the video available now for a couple of days already on the internet channel YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWcD-YCjjKU#t=405>

In the video, among other, the use of cranes for trimming trees and repairing traffic lights is obvious, both of which are hardly private property. The speed and professionalism in which individuals in the video are painting over the election materials with spray paint is also worrying.

The state has also failed to disassociate itself from the published documents in which citizens of Northern Kosovo are literally urged to vote for the Citizens Initiative Srpska, if they want to keep their jobs.

Such an atmosphere painfully reminds of the period of demonstrations in Jarinje, which were also, allegedly, the work of “self-organized citizens”, even though the gravel used for the barricades was brought by trucks belonging to Serbian public enterprises, and a labour obligation to take part in the barricades was in force, with a shift schedule issued by Serbian institutions. Like at the time, individuals and firms representing themselves as private security companies still operate in Northern Kosovo, although there is no official register of such actors, nor is the Serbian Business Registers Agency capable of verifying their operation.

The same situation is present regarding the so-called civil protection units, assembled by Krstimir Pantić, Deputy Director of the Government’s Office for Kosovo and Metohija, and also the Candidate Mayor for North Mitrovica, who is threatening to boycott the elections in case the election material is not “status-neutral”, blaming Prishtina and the EU for this in advance. These units should not be allowed to demonstrate with weapons, but did so, even in front of representatives of the international community. Their presence and activities disturb those Kosovo citizens who want to give their support to political options which will help them confront the many communal challenges they are faced with. The general dress-code of the mentioned individuals is uncomfortably reminiscent of the style of Aleksandar Vulin, and the so-called Faculty of Physical Science students from his vast entourage who rioted during a visit to Gračanica.

With concern, CEAS is also monitoring the fact that other election lists formed by Serbs in Kosovo are either faced with complete media blockage, in the best, or completely demonized, in the worst case scenario. CEAS calls upon those intending to take part in the

local elections to give up on the idea of desecration of election material, aimed at achieving “status neutrality” of the same, which they are virtually being encouraged to do by the Serbian Government insisting on this due to the potential for declaring such “polished” material as invalid, and having their results disqualified. Prior to any such action they should hold detailed consultations, primarily with representatives of OSCE.

The Western international community has punished the previous Government for its indecisive and/or hypocritical behaviour regarding Kosovo. It is however, for the time being, giving the current Government unconditional support for every positive step made towards the aim of normalizing relations with Kosovo, but this support must be justified.

Having in mind the wave of incidents that swept the whole of Kosovo prior to the elections, and above all, the still unresolved murder of the Lithuanian Customs Officer, CEAS calls upon the Serbian Government to take explicit measures to demonstrate its genuine interest for the local elections in Kosovo to pass in peace and be regular; and also to investigate the use of public property in activities calling for boycott. Additionally, the Government should pay a full attention to chains of command in all its security structure departments.

It should by no means be forgotten that holding local elections in Kosovo is, as the first major step towards advancing relations, also the first time that a mutual agreement has been reached between Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels. Belgrade should by no means jeopardize this.

Duplicity is not a smart option this time.

Belgrade, November 1, 2013

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR EURO-ATLANTIC STUDIES

The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies – CEAS is an independent, atheist, socially oriented left liberal think-tank organization, founded in 2007 in Belgrade. With its high quality research work CEAS generates precise analysis in the field of foreign, security and defense policy of the Republic of Serbia. Simultaneously, CEAS publicly promotes innovative, applicable recommendations and creates practical policy whose aims are:

- Strengthening of the socially oriented, left liberal democracy in Serbia*
- Adopting the principle of precedence of individual over collective rights, without disregard for the rights which individuals can only achieve through collective action
- Development of the concept of transitional justice and the establishment of mechanisms for its enforcement in the Western Balkans region, exchange of positive experiences, emphasizing the importance of mechanisms of transitional justice for a successful security sector reform in post-conflict societies in transition towards democracy;
- Acceleration of the processes of Serbian EU integration and strengthening of its capacities for confronting global challenges through collective international action.
- Strengthening cooperation with NATO and advocacy for Serbian Atlantic integration
- Strengthening a secular state principle and promoting an atheistic understanding of the world
- Contributing to the erection and preservation of a more open, safe, prosperous and cooperative international order, founded on the principles of smart globalization and equitable sustainable development and the international norm of 'Responsibility to Protect'

CEAS fulfills the mentioned activities through various projects assorted in four permanent programs:

- Advocacy for Serbian Euro-Atlantic Integration

- Security Sector Reform in Serbia
- Transitional justice
- Liberalism, Globalization, International Relations and Human Rights

CEAS is an active member of the REKOM coalition which gathers more than 1,800 civil society organizations, individuals from all the countries stemming from the break-up of former SFRY. Among them are also missing persons' parental and family societies, veterans, news reporters, representatives of minority ethnic communities, organizations for the protection of human rights, etc. The REKOM coalition suggests that governments (or states) establish REKOM, an independent, inter-state Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts on all the victims of war crimes and other heavy human rights violations undertaken on the territory of the former SFRY in the period 1991-2001. During 2012 Ceas became an associate member of the international association of expert non-governmental organisations (think-tanks) from Europe and Central Asia – PASOS, which supports the erection and functioning of an open society, especially in relation to issues of political and economic transition, democratisation and human rights, opening up of the economy and good public governance, sustainable development and international cooperation. PASOS now has 40 full and 10 associate members, amongst which is the prestigious European Council on Foreign Relations from London – ECFR, and, until now, only the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy – BCSP, from the non-governmental sector in Serbia. During the same year, the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies became the first civil society organisation from the region of South-Eastern Europe to join the international Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect – RtoP as a full member. The coalition brings together non-governmental organisations from all over the world to collectively strengthen normative consensus for the doctrine of responsibility to protect (RtoP), with the aim of better understanding the norm, pushing for strengthened capacities of the international community to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and mobilise the non-governmental sector to push for action to save lives in RtoP country-specific situations. Among the prominent members of the Coalition are organisations such as the Human Rights Watch – HRW and the International Crisis Group – ICG.



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