

Kosovo Serbs in the dialogue process

April
2021



Characteristics
of the open society
within Serb community
in Kosovo

Openness of Serbian
media in Kosovo

Civil society
organizations in the
Serbian community in
Kosovo – Between
perceptions and
presentation

Political parties
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the political system of
Kosovo: From pluralism
to monism

Attitudes of Kosovo
Serbs of security
institutions

Openness of institutions
to the citizens of Kosovo

Community Rights in
Kosovo

**Kosovo Serbs in the
dialogue process**

Analysis of the
economic situation in
the Serb-populated
areas in Kosovo

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1. Introduction

On the study

The aim of this study is to present more completely one of the aspects of the topics on which the research within OPEN project was conducted, the purpose of which is measuring the openness of the Kosovo Serb community. Different dimensions of the dialogue will be in the focus of the study, i. e. the normalization process pursued between Belgrade and Pristina with a special emphasis on the impact and practical consequences it has had on this non-majority community. More precisely, the study is an attempt to identify the advantages and flaws of the process itself from a perspective of the Serb community and in the light of contemporary political, economic, cultural and inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo, as well as of the dialogue between the official Belgrade and Pristina. To that end, a comprehensive research approach and methods were used to give an insight in the perceptions of the members of Kosovo Serb community on inclusiveness, effectiveness, transparency and the future of the dialogue process. The comprehensiveness of the approach is based on the fact that it is necessary to have an in-depth and relevant research which is to be a point of departure in identification and mapping the key views and needs of this community. Research results indicate key factors and dimensions of the dialogue process to which decision-makers should pay special attention, particularly those that create strategies and policies relating to the relations between Pristina and Belgrade. In

addition to providing a basis to make an impact on decision-makers, the aim of the study is also to familiarize the broader public with the needs of Kosovo Serb community and its own perception of its role in the dialogue process, i. e. in the normalization of relations.

On project partners

NGO AKTIV is a non-governmental organization making efforts to encourage civil participation within the community in the spheres of economic, cultural and social development. Its projects and activities in the region reflect a holistic approach to problem-solving and a firm belief in inclusiveness of communities and active inclusion in civil-organization life. Its work on projects reflects a very versatile approach of NGO AKTIV and its activities have extended to include projects focusing on fostering capacities of local public institutions, providing vulnerable groups within Kosovo greater access to judiciary mechanisms, as well as the rule of law issues. As AKTIV is gaining in importance in the local community, its collaboration with other civil-society organizations and public sector at the local and central level deepens and AKTIV has managed to increase the scope and coverage of its projects. In that sense AKTIV aims to enable appropriate participation of the Kosovo Serb community in the post-conflict and prosperous future in the region in which the empowered individuals and institutions of open and active

communities contribute to a lasting development of Kosovo through open, transparent and democratic procedures against the observance of human rights.

Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration. (FDMC) is a civil-society organization involved in the promotion of European values and the European integration process itself in Kosovo. FDMC is an independent non-profit organization promoting the development of civil society, human rights and communities on democratic principles. FDMC collaborates with various ethnic groups through smaller consultative processes/activities. Its main principles are tolerance, establishing partnerships with other organizations (from the majority population community), as well as with people, which is of utmost importance and the principal value of this organization. Activities of FDMC are directed to fostering NGO sector, provision of technical assistance and information to local self-governments and citizens relating to connecting, promotion of culture and advocacy of the NGO sector in the public, NGO networking and coordinating NGOs in joint projects, provision of services such as public informing, dialogue and process of reconciliation between the communities in Kosovo. FDMC also promotes cooperation between NGOs and central-level institutions.



Research results indicate key factors and dimensions of the dialogue process to which decision-makers should pay special attention, particularly those that create strategies and policies relating to the relations between Pristina and Belgrade

2. Summary

The context

The process of long-standing negotiations conducted between Belgrade and Pristina has undergone a number of stages which significantly determined the present context of the political life in Kosovo. Changes of the dialogue format, as well as of its mediators in the course of two decades has not enabled laying foundations of sustainable inter-ethnic relations and relations between the two negotiating parties. Affected by political pragmatism and under the influence of nationalistic narratives, with mediators occasionally passive and indecisive, the dialogue is still underway and it is a process for which it is not certain if it has an ultimate aim.

Following the failure of the Ahtisaari plan, the mediation in negotiations was taken over by the European Union. Signing technical agreements offering overcoming the specific issues was followed by a highest-level dialogue. Brussels Agreement, as a document supposed to pave way to a comprehensive problem-solving that prevented a faster progress in the region and the European integration, remained unimplemented, just as the majority of agreements signed between Belgrade and Pristina in Brussels did. Interruptions in the dialogue process prevented its sustainable continuity and one of the last attempts to revive it took place in Washington.

In the overall situation the perceptions and views of Kosovo Serbs on decisions that directly

affect them have not been sufficiently examined and analyzed. Under such circumstances it was necessary to conduct an in-depth research on the views, interests and wishes of the Kosovo Serb community relating to the consequences and implications of the implementation of decisions made during the negotiation process, including determining the future of the dialogue.

Study methodology

The partners conducting the research organized eight focus groups in total, evenly distributed in the areas north and south of the Ibar/Ibër. For the research to incorporate in-depth information, twelve expert interviews were also made with some key protagonists from the Kosovo Serb community with relevant knowledge on the dialogue process, as well as in the fields narrowly related to the subject matter of this study.

In addition to research activities conducted by the partners dealing with the issue of dialogue, a public opinion survey was made at the OPEN initiative level. This method comprised 600 respondents, members of the Kosovo Serb community and the survey covered issues of key importance and interest for this non-majority community. The issue of the dialogue, among others, was part of the research spectrum and the survey results are included in this paper and presented in it. The aim of the research approach was to encourage Kosovo Serbs to talk openly and freely about consequences the dialogue process between Pristina and

Belgrade had on them, with a possibility of giving proposals and suggestions for its modification or a complete change.

Key findings

It is found during the research activities that members of the Kosovo Serb community shared views on the impact of the negotiation process between Pristina and Belgrade on their everyday life. The key findings deduced during the research show that, from the point of view of this community:

- in general, the dialogue has had a negative effect on the life of Serbs in Kosovo;
- the dialogue process lacks transparency and objective information on the process itself;
- there has been no advocacy of authentic interests of this community due to a non-inclusive nature of negotiations (i. e. absence of representatives of Kosovo Serbs as a unique negotiating entity);
- Belgrade is the only party in negotiations in which the community has confidence;
- it is necessary to proceed with negotiations on three (new) key topics: resolving the issue of the missing and kidnapped persons and sustainable return, speeding up the process of resolving proprietary issues and sustainable protection of the Serb cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo.

Key recommendations

- Dialogue continuation should include representatives of Kosovo Serbs and the negotiation process needs to be entirely transparent.
- Kosovo Serbs should be given more space and opportunities for decision-making at the local and central level against the observance of their human and minority rights.
- Priority topics of the community deduced in the research should be included in the agenda of the continuation of dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina against mediator's guarantees and process monitoring by the EU.
- Any solution on which Pristina and Belgrade negotiate should be a result of consultations with local population, free from implementation of imposed and nontransparent solutions.

3. Kosovo Serbs in the dialogue process

A winding road to the (Brussels) dialogue

A prehistory of the Brussels dialogue

Following the signing of the Military-Technical Agreement in Kumanovo¹ on 9 June 1999, armed conflicts of wider proportions ceased, and it was believed by international circles that by that a long-awaited peace in Kosovo was established. However, introduction of international administration on the territory of Kosovo posed great challenges that would lead to swift changes and present a framework for further development of inter-ethnic relations and arrangement of political forces in Kosovo (and the region). Insufficient involvement of the UN peace-keeping mission² (established by the 12/44 Resolution) in providing safety to all citizens of Kosovo had as a direct consequence a displacement of approximately 242.000 members of the non-Albanian part of the population from Kosovo³, followed by unexplained violent incidents, posing threat and leading to destruction of private and public property, as well as murders⁴.

1 Vlada Republike Srbije, Vojno-tehnički sporazum, available on: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/?id=19947>

2 United Nations, United Nations Resolution 1244, 10.7.1999, available on: <https://unmik.unmissions.org/united-nations-resolution-1244>

3 Vlada Republike Srbije, Interno raseljena i prognana lica sa Kosova i Metohije, available on: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/20031>

4 Tim Judah, Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know, Kosovo University Press, 2008, p. 93-107.

Destructive consequences of the war in which, according to various estimates (directly or indirectly) approximately 13.535 persons lost their life (and disappeared)⁵, has been paralyzing for almost two decades the process of social and economic recovery, return of displaced persons and a longer period of political stability and regional relations as a result of the absence of nationalist discourse.

Although the Kumanovo Agreement contains elements of a peace agreement, a long-standing and sustainable peace fell victim to complex historical-political circumstances reaching back even to the time of disintegration of Yugoslavia. Presence of international forces did not bring confidence among the members of non-majority communities, whereas inaction in terms of a direct intervention and prevention of conflicts of wider proportions reached its climax during violent protests in mid-March 2004. There are different and often entirely contradictory views as to the cause of the March violence. Yet it led to unconceivable consequences affecting the coexistence of communities in Kosovo. According to OSCE estimates, in total 19 persons died on 17, 18 and 19 March (11 Kosovo Albanians and 8 Serbs)⁶, while UN

5 Fond za humanitarno pravo, 31.600 dokumenata nedvosmisleno potvrđuje smrt ili nestanak 13.535 osoba tokom rata na Kosovu, 6.2.2015, available on: <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=28185>

6 Organizacija za evropsku bezbednost i saradnju (OEBS) Misija na Kosovu, Četiri godine kasnije: Pregled predmeta u vezi

reports state that 954 persons were injured during those violent incidents⁷⁸. On the other hand, significant material damage was made to both civilian and cultural-religious targets: approximately 730 houses (in the majority of cases owned by Kosovo Serbs) were destroyed or damaged, 36 Orthodox churches and monasteries were damaged or destroyed (two monasteries under UNESCO protection sustained damage), and a significant damage was made to the premises of UNMIK, KFOR and Provisional Institutions of Self-Government⁹. It is estimated that approximately 4000 non-Albanians were forced to leave their homes¹⁰. As a consequence of the March events, violence also spread out of the territory of Kosovo, and in mass and, in some places, violent protests mosques in Belgrade and Niš were destroyed by fire.¹¹

In the light of March events and unstable political situation in Kosovo, and aspirations and desire of the Kosovo Albanians to establish an independent state, talks on potential solutions to a set

of problems and challenges started at the level of international community. Although different proposals as to how to unravel the *Kosovo Gordian knot* came to light, the initiators of a more specific step aimed at resolving a long-standing problem *in the yard of Europe*, gathered within the (informal) Contact Group (USA, Great Britain, Russia, France and Italy) in the United Nations. For that purpose, the UN appointed in mid-November 2005 a former president of Finland Martti Ahtisaari as Special Envoy in charge of the future status of Kosovo¹², which would set the process of resolving the conflict situation, then at a standstill, in motion. The task of the envoy was to draw up a comprehensive, detailed and phased plan on the (final) resolution of the status of Kosovo against the observance of the rights and needs of all communities in Kosovo.

After unsuccessful negotiations at the technical level, a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina at the highest political level was held in 2006¹³. What is to be subsequently termed the Vienna negotiations, were actually meetings with mediators attended by the highest political representatives, from presidents and prime ministers of both negotiating parties to diplomatic representatives (of Serbia), and (Kosovo) opposition representatives. Although the UN-led, i. e. with the Special Envoy, the negotiations did not bear fruit as Belgrade turned down Martti Ahtisaari's proposal in February 2007¹⁴. Diametrically opposing views of the parties were confronted regarding the key

sa martovskim neredima 2004. godine u krivičnom pravosudnom sistemu Kosova, 2008, available on: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/4/32701.pdf>

7 United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, 30 April 2004, available on: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/kos%20S2004%20348.pdf>

8 In addition to that, 65 members of international police forces, 58 KPF members 61 members of the staff sustained serious injuries.

9 Organizacija za evropsku bezbednost i saradnju (OEBS) Misija na Kosovu, Četiri godine kasnije: Pregled predmeta u vezi sa martovskim neredima 2004. godine u krivičnom pravosudnom sistemu Kosova, 2008, available on: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/4/32701.pdf>

10 B92, 11 years since "March Pogrom" of Serbs in Kosovo, 17 March 2015, available on: https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2015&mm=03&dd=17&nav_id=93505

11 TRT bosanski, Dan džamija u Srbiji: Prije jedanaest godina gorjele džamije u Beogradu i Nišu, 18 March 2015, available on: <https://www.trt.net.tr/bosanski/region/2015/03/18/dan-dz-amija-u-srbiji-prije-jedanaest-godina-gorjele-dz-amije-u-beo-gradu-i-nisu-40455>

12 United Nations, Secretary General appoints former president Martti Ahtisaari of Finland as Special Envoy for Future Status Process for Kosovo, 15 November 2005, available: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/sga955.doc.htm>

13 Vreme, Srpska karta na zelenoj čoji, 27 July 2006, available: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=460495>

14 Vreme, Propali bečki pregovori, 15 March 2007, available on: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=491314>

issue of discord, as the very working title of the initiative says – the status: while Pristina did not accept anything except full independence, the autonomy of the area was the red line for Belgrade. Moreover, views on decentralization, rights of minorities, protection of cultural and religious heritage, economic issues that were in the focus of Vienna negotiations, were far from constructive. The very proposal in the form of a document with the working title *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement*¹⁵ contains a number of recommendations for paving the way and facilitating the transition from a status quo to a sustainable solution for the status of Kosovo. The proposal offered a basis for the protection of rights, identity and culture of non-majority communities with a focus on establishing a framework for their active participation in the public life.

Due to absence of a full international support to the rejected Ahtisaari plan, and due to a support of a part of the international community, Pristina decided to take a step that would fundamentally change the facts on the ground. Namely on 17 February 2008, the Assembly of Kosovo declared independence in accordance with, as explicitly stated, the proposal of the *Ahtisaari plan*¹⁶. Taking the plan as a basis, Pristina adopted its Constitution and passed laws on the very principles and measures defined in this document. As a point of order of the *Vienna negotiations*, the package of rights anticipated for non-majority communities was included in the legal frameworks enabling partly materialization of the results of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina:

- Kosovo is defined as a multi-ethnic, state of its citizens in which the culture, languages and symbols of non-majority communities shall be respected and protected;
- the percentage/number of members of non-majority communities (therefore Kosovo

15 United Nations Security Council, *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement*, 26 March 2007, available on: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Kosovo%20S2007%20168.Add1.pdf>

16 Ustav Republike Kosovo, poglavlje XIII, član 143, available on: <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Ustav1.pdf>

Serbs as well) participating in institutional bodies at the local and central level is anticipated, therefore their participation in democratic decision-making processes as well;

- a possibility of setting up Serb-majority municipalities is defined and at the same time a possibility of decentralization;
- special zones are set up aimed at protection of cultural and religious heritage, and therefore the protection of the Kosovo Serb cultural and religious (Serbian Orthodox Church) heritage as well.

However, despite efforts made in establishing a continuity between the Ahtisaari plan and the act of proclamation of independence, the implementation of the above listed principles in the first years since being made known was slow. Integration of the Serbs in the (new) Kosovo system has been politically stuck between Belgrade and Pristina, and this process additionally prevented a progress in the sphere of democracy, fostering institutions, reconciliation processes, and building up a more tolerant multi-ethnic society. The absence of integration of the northern part of Kosovo in the new system practically paralyzed the process of implementation of the Ahtisaari plan on the entire territory of Kosovo. With constant frictions between Pristina and Belgrade, the accumulated and unsolved issues dividing the negotiating parties necessitated the continuation of negotiations on finding sustainable solutions.

Chronology of the Brussels dialogue

Failures in attempts to integrate the northern (Serb-majority populated) part of Kosovo in the legal and political system necessitated the continuation of dialogue. As in the case of the Vienna negotiations, the initiative to start talks came from the international community. A maneuvering space to resume the dialogue was found immediately before rendering an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence¹⁷. This time the leading role was as-

17 International Court of Justice, *Advisory opinion: Accor-*

sumed by the European Union, not the UN, desiring to contribute to the elimination of differences and barriers that were an impediment to the relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Namely, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution (64/298)¹⁸ on 9 September 2010 enabling the continuation and starting the EU-facilitated dialogue. As it is stated in the resolution, the objective of the new rounds of talks was to "promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of people"¹⁹. The point made in messages given by EU officials, and in the resolution itself, is that the dialogue will focus on three key factors – peace, security and stability.

As the EU conditioned the process of European integration of Kosovo and Serbia by the newly established negotiation network and linked the process with it²⁰, its role as a mediator in negotiations gained additionally in importance. Following the preparatory consultations and establishing a legal basis for dialogue continuation^{21,22}, the talks at the so-called technical level commenced on 9 March 2011. Representatives of expert teams of Pristina and Belgrade led by Edita Tahiri (deputy prime minister of Kosovo and minister for dialogue) and Borko Stefanović (special representative of Belgrade for dialogue) negotiated at the expert level. The delegation managed, in the technical format, from the beginning of negotiations until 12 July 2012, to formulate the agreement contents and agree on it in the spheres requiring specific

dance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in respect of Kosovo, 22 July 2010, available on: <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

18 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 64/298, 9 September 2010, available on: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/ROL%20A%20RES64%20298.pdf>

19 Ibid.

20 European Commission, Indicative Strategy Paper for Serbia (2014-2020), 2014

21 Skupština Republike Kosovo, Rezolucija o dijalogu između Republike Kosovo i Republike Srbije, 10 March 2011, available on: http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/Rezoluta_per_dialogun_midis_R.Kosoves_dhe_R.Serbise_2.pdf

22 Narodna Skupština Republike Srbije, Deklaracija Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije o aktuelnom stanju na Kosovu i Metohiji nakon jednostranih i nasilnih akata privremenih institucija samouprave u Prištini, član 6.b., Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, 1 August 2011, available on: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuiid=e6c46ed1-2e23-4f92-89fa-09e2b41e2d6a®actid=422134&doctype=reg>

steps in resolving issues that affected the relations of the two parties:

- *Agreement on freedom of movement (2 July 2011)*
- *Agreement of registry books (2 July 2011)*
- *Agreement on cadastral books (2 July 2011)*
- *Agreement on mutual recognition of university diplomas (2 July 2011)*
- *Agreement on customs seals (2 September 2011)*
- *Agreement on integrated border management (2 December 2011)*
- *Agreement on regional representation and cooperation (24 February 2012)*
- *Agreement on liaison officers (19 October 2012, renewed on 30 May and 4 December 2013)*

As the negotiated spheres partly stretched into the domain of political issues, there was a need to reinforce the dialogue process by lifting the level of negotiations from technical to a higher, political. Although it is not clear where this initiative came from and when it was realized that it was necessary to have dialogue at the political level, it is possible to determine that a point in time in which representing the parties at a higher level was proposed, was the adoption of the Assembly of Kosovo Resolution on Normalization of Relations²³ mandating the Government to hold talks with Belgrade. On the other hand, Belgrade did not hint in any official document the change of format of negotiations held in Brussels. As of 19 October 2012, meetings at the political level were led by prime ministers of Kosovo and Serbia - Hashim Thaçi and Ivica Dačić.

A turning point as to the nature and form of dialogue was explained as a need to foster a symbolic and practical importance of the dialogue process and adding it a political tone. To that end, with a delay in relation to Pristina, Belgrade

23 Skupština Republike Kosovo, Rezolucija o normalizaciji odnosa između Republike Kosovo i Republike Srbije, 18 October 2012, available on: http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/Rezolute_Marredhenive_Kosova_Serbija.pdf

adopted on 13 January 2013 the *Political Platform for Talks with the Representatives of Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina*, making eventually the new character of negotiations official²⁴. With an intention to improve relations in the spheres of key importance for the normalization process, talks resumed on the topics that for years had made lives of the citizens of Kosovo harder, and had been put aside due to the absence of direct communication between the negotiating parties. To achieve that, it was necessary to define basic principles on which the dialogue at the political level would go on. A document under the working title the *First Agreement on Principles Governing Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina* was signed on 19 April 2013.^{25,26} This important document deals with resolving key issues in the process of integration of municipalities in the north in the legal and political system of Kosovo, as well as the elimination of the so-called parallel institutions from the territory of Kosovo:

- establishment of the Association/Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities,
- integration of members of security structures of Serbia in Kosovo in the Kosovo system,
- establishment of a regional police center (with a separate commander) for four northern municipalities (North Mitrovica, Zvečan/Zveçan, Leposavić/q and Zubin Potok),
- integration of judiciary bodies (in the north) in the Kosovo judiciary system,
- agreement on holding local elections in the four municipalities in the north,
- defining principles of mutual non-blocking the EU integration process; and
- announcement of elimination of barriers in the sphere of telecommunications and energy.

24 Vlada Republike Srbije, *Politička platforma za razgovore sa predstavnicima privremenih institucija samouprave u Prištini*, 13 January 2013, available on: https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/183065/politicka_platforma_kim2013_lat.pdf

25 Kancelarija za Kosovo i Metohiju, *Prvi sporazum o principima normalizacije odnosa između Beograda i Prištine*, 19 April 2013, available on: <http://www.kim.gov.rs/p03.php>

26 Insaider, *Vlada Kosova uvela takse od 100 odsto i na robu stranih kompanija koje imaju pogone u Srbiji*, 28 December 2018, available on: <https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/vazno/13010/>

The Agreement to be subsequently termed the Brussels Agreement was a big step toward overcoming the then existing issues in the relations between Belgrade and Pristina and a clear signal to the European Union on desire of negotiating parties to make progress in the European integration process by working out sustainable solutions. The announcement on setting up an implementation committee (defined by this Agreement) was an assurance that, unlike the previous signed technical agreements (the implementation of which was at a slow pace), the Brussels Agreement will increase responsibilities of its signatories. Riding the wave of signing the Brussels Agreement, the EU-facilitated negotiations proceeded and agreements aimed at legal regulation of responsibilities in overcoming barriers in the spheres requiring specific measures were signed:

- *Agreement on telecommunications (8 September 2013)*
- *Agreement on energy (8 September 2013)*
- *Agreement on official visits (7 October 2013)*
- *Agreement on police integration (31 December 2013)*
- *Agreement on judiciary (9 February 2015)*
- *Agreement on abolishing civil defense (26 March 2015)*
- *Agreement on mutual recognition of vehicle insurance policies (25 June 2015)*
- *Agreement on pharmaceutical product certificates (27 June 2015)*
- *Agreement on mutual recognition of ADR Certificates (19 April 2016)*
- *Agreement on Mitrovica bridge revitalization (8 June 2016)*

In the period between 2015 and 2018, a number of action plans and conclusions on the implementation of already made agreements were signed. However, due to a halt in negotiations caused by the imposition of Kosovo tariffs on import of goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina²⁷, the activities on the implementa-

27 Agencija Anadolu, *Danas stupila na snagu odluka Vlade Kosova o ukidanju taksi BiH i Srbiji*, 1 April 2020, available on: <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/ekonomija/danas-stupila-na-snagu-odluka-vlade-kosova-o-ukidanju-taksi-bih-i-srbiji/1787498>

tion of all concluded agreements was completely blocked. After almost a year and a half after the imposition of tariffs, they were abolished on 1 April 2020²⁸, as a result of a great pressure of the international community. However, in the meantime the USA took the initiative to restore the dialogue and mediated in negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina. The first result of the initiative were *railway and highway agreements* signed on 14 February 2020 in Munich. As the title of the deal suggests, it relates to restoring the railway and accompanying infrastructure between Pristina and Niš, and the construction of a highway between these two cities to reinforce economic and telecommunication ties between the negotiating parties. Finally, as a climax of diplomatic enterprises of the USA to normalize the relations between Belgrade and Pristina, on 4 October of the same year the Agreement on Economic Normalization of Relations (the so-called Washington Agreements) was signed, comprising the following obligations of the parties:

- obligation to implement the agreements signed on 14 February,
- collaboration with the US International Development Finance Corporation,
- opening and managing the Merdare common crossing point facility,
- making feasibility study on sharing the capacity of Lake Gazivode/Ujmani,
- joining mini-Schengen zone,
- energy supply diversification,
- restoration of inter-religion communication, protection of religious sites and implementation of judicial decisions pertaining to the Serbian Orthodox Church,
- expediting efforts to locate and identify the remains of missing persons,
- implementation of a one-year moratorium on Kosovo seeking membership in international organizations on the one, and on Serbia's campaign of derecognition of Kosovo as an independent state on the other hand,

28 Slobodna Evropa, Srbija i Kosovo: Potpisani sporazumi o autoputu i železnici, 14 February 2020, available on: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbijaj-kosovo-sporazum-autoput-zeleznica/30434613.html>

- as well as a number of other issues²⁹ indirectly relating to the relations of the negotiating parties with the USA.³⁰

Although it is publicly said by some that the legal nature of the agreement is contestable, the majority of relevant international players approved signing the agreement as one of the important steps in returning to the normalization of relations and signing a final agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. One of the first steps toward agreement implementation was the establishment of the International Development Finance Corporation in Belgrade, opening and managing the Merdare joint crossing, as well as the beginning of a preparatory stage for analysis on sharing material and energy potentials of Lake Gazivode/Ujmani between the negotiating parties.

A negotiating triangle: Pristina, Belgrade and Brussels

In the period following the armed conflicts, three key international actors mediated in the process of normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade: the United Nations, the European Union and the United States of America. Despite a proactive involvement of these three protagonists in international relations on instituting a sustainable platform for negotiations and practical implementation of signed agreements and undertaken obligations, the entire process had little success. At the time of Vienna negotiations and presentation of the Ahtisaari plan, non-existence of the least common denominator in the interests of negotiating parties had a huge impact on the failure of the process. Firm stands which neither Pristina nor Belgrade were willing to depart from only added to the principal disadvantage, i. e. poor reputation

29 Prohibition of the use of 5G equipment supplied by untrusted vendors, increased airline passenger screening, continuation of restitution of the property of Jewish victims of holocaust without successors, push for decriminalization of homosexuality in 69 countries, designating Hezbollah as terrorist organization and mutual recognition of Kosovo and Israel and opening negotiating parties' embassies in Jerusalem.

30 N1 Info, Šta je potpisano – tekst sporazuma, 5 September 2020, available on: <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a636581/Tekst-sporazuma-Beograd-Pristina.html>

and mediating potential of the UN (and its special envoy for negotiations).

Due to cessation of communication between Belgrade and Pristina after the declaration of independence, the EU, for the sake of stability and prosperity of the region of the Western Balkans, decided to facilitate negotiations as a mediator which could have been at the same time an impetus in the European integration process of Serbia and Kosovo. Mediators in the dialogue process, Catherine Ashton and Federica Mogherini lead negotiations at the political level. The negotiations were frequently abused for internal-policy purposes in Serbia and Kosovo which simultaneously slowed down the implementation of the agreements made. On the other hand, non-transparency of the very dialogue process was demonstrated while it was EU-led, and further diminished the legitimacy of negotiations in the eyes of the population of Kosovo and Serbia. With such predispositions, the carrot (promises to speed up the EU integration process) and stick (potential halt / slowing down of the process) strategy pursued by the EU toward Belgrade and Pristina did not yield good results. Moreover, the EU as the mediator in the negotiations failed to provide a subsequent and adequate agreement implementation monitoring mechanism and the negotiating parties were left sufficient room for prolongation, postponing and refusing to implement the assumed obligations. Due to that Brussels failed in its attempt to position itself as a mediator with prerequisite authority which would enable a smooth normalization process. Lastly, the EU did not clearly and officially define the contents, essence and aim of the very process of normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade. Pristina as a negotiating party insisted from the very beginning on its position that negotiations led directly and exclusively to a mutual recognition. However, the international community pressure kept returning it at the negotiating table, as prior to such scenario it was necessary to take certain steps which would possibly lead to an internationally valid mutual recognition. Political instability as a constant of Kosovo political scene demonstrated through frequent disagreements of political factors on the priorities in the dialogue process resulted in inconsis-

tency in the approach to negotiations. In addition to that, the frequently criticized autonomy (and partial irresponsibility of other Pristina institutions) in presenting the interests of Kosovo by the prime minister (afterwards president) Hashim Thaçi, was perceived as an activity contrary to the principles of state interests of Kosovo. The absence of political will to implement the agreements made, particularly those relating to the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities, created an atmosphere of the lack of responsibility to internationally undertaken obligations. Besides, non-transparent, informal and entirely unclear announcements on a potential demarcation between Kosovo and Serbia additionally undermined the credibility of the process in Kosovo, and partially in Serbia as well.

Contrary to Pristina, Belgrade stuck firmly to a principle according to which Kosovo as a territorial whole was an autonomous province within the legal and administrative system of Serbia. Despite the fact that concessions made during negotiations were in contravention of the Constitution of Serbia, it was frequently (officially) pointed out that all undertaken measures were fully in line with the current legal framework. Although Belgrade explicitly rejected the Ahtisaari's proposal, it unofficially accepted the principles defined in that document by the very act of ratifying the Brussels Agreement which is actually based on the offered models of resolving the intra-Kosovo legal and administrative organization issue. Unlike the unstable political scene in Kosovo, Serbia in the period after 2012, due to relatively stable ruling coalitions, maintained a consistent position during negotiations, yet without clearly and officially defined guidelines for the direction which the dialogue should lead to. Except general principles stated in the *Political Platform for Talks with Representatives of Provisional Institutions of Self-government* in Pristina, the aim and potential scenario of the normalization process were not specified. On the other hand, public opinion polls indicate that among the population in Kosovo there is certain, yet limited, degree of confidence in the dialogue process, as well as in the negotiating parties and mediators. Thus, in a survey conducted in 2019, it is found that among the members of Kosovo

Serb community the EU is still perceived as a key mediator in the process of normalization of relations. Slightly more than 20 percent of respondents deem that the EU lost this position, whereas approximately 80 % still expect the involvement of the EU in the same capacity.³¹ However, it is shown in the same survey that Kosovo Serbs, when the international policy is concerned, should mostly rely on Russia (45 %), USA (5,6 %), whereas the mediator in dialogue process, the EU, is favored by 8,3 %³². On the other hand, a public opinion survey conducted among the members of the majority community in Kosovo shows that more than a half of citizens do not see any improvement in the relations between the negotiating parties and that they do not believe that the Brussels dialogue succeeded in normalizing their relations³³.

Accomplishments and obstacles on the way of normalization

Constructive ambiguity as an essence of the contents of agreements signed since the beginning of the EU-led dialogue prevented from the very beginning their adequate implementation. Coupled with a pronounced absence of political will of Belgrade and Pristina to implement what is agreed, a constructive ambiguity offered a sufficient alibi to negotiating parties for a very modest progress in the process of normalization of mutual relations. Different interpretations of the content of the agreement postponed their implementation and consequently some agreements remained unimplemented at all. The most obvious example of such approach is the obligation of establishing the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities, regarding which, beside disagreements on the very name of the body, there have been opposing views as to the remaining items of the signed Brussels Agreement as well.

31 NGO AKTIV, Trend analiza, 2019, available on: <http://ngoaktiv.org/uploads/files/Analiza%20trendova%202019.pdf>

32 Ibid.

33 Kosova Democratic Institute, Normalizimi i marrëdhënieve Kosovë – Serbi, këndvështrimi i qytetarëve, 2018, available on: <http://www.votaim.org/Public/Article?PollDialog=true&PollDialog=false&SelectedTab=Polls&PollSelectedMonthID=&PollSelectedYear=#polls>

Although a number of agreements provides for regulation of problems in the spheres that for years have been creating problems to the population of Kosovo, a very small progress has been made in facilitating and simplifying the procedures and measures of significance for everyday life of citizens. Advancements in facilitating the freedom of movement resulted to a certain extent in greater circulation within Kosovo, and to/from Serbia, whereas the Agreement on Telecommunications partly regulates operating of mts d.o.o. network on a part of Kosovo territory. Integration of security forces and judiciary system also led to some extent to the institution of the rule of law in the north of Kosovo, which was not the case in the period prior to signing the Brussels Agreement. Despite that, the achievements are mainly of a limited range there where implementation processes were done inadequately and without a comprehensive approach in resolving issues in full, i. e. in the spirit of obligations resulting from the agreements. From the examples of partially (successful) implemented agreements a principle on which the negotiation process pace was based could be figured out:

- *freedom of movement*: issuance of documents and travel documents in Kosovo is still a serious problem for the citizens of Kosovo of Serb ethnicity, whereas owners of registration plates with indicated Kosovo places³⁴ (and issued by the Ministry of Interior of Serbia) have a limited freedom of movement on the territory of Kosovo (except on the territories of four northern municipalities);
- *communications*: the range of mts d.o.o. mobile telephony signals is limited to certain areas populated by Kosovo Serbs, while out of them it is not possible to make calls /access the internet;
- *integration of security forces*: the work of the Kosovo Police in the north is often criticized due to poor and insufficiently adequate exercising of powers, whereas the integration of former members of the Civil Defense has not been entirely completed yet;

34 PR – Priština (Prishtinë), KM – Kosovska Mitrovica (Mitrovicë), GL – Gnjilane (Gjilan), UR – Uroševac (Ferizaj), PZ – Prizren, ĐA – Đakovica (Gjakova) and PE – Peç (Peja)

- *integration of judiciary*: functioning of integrated judiciary institutions is facing a great number of problems, from insufficient human resources, absence of (exact and timely) translation (from Serbian into Albanian and vice versa), and amassed cases.

Mutual recognition of ADR certificates and insurance policies simplified the transport of goods between Kosovo and Serbia, whereas due to previously mentioned problems, elimination of barriers on crossings has not been given priority. Although the Agreement on Regional Representation and Cooperation did not bring direct benefits to Kosovo Serbs, the process of implementation of the agreement, nevertheless, even with significant limitations, gave a positive result. A similar outcome is that of exchange of liaison officers which worked up to a certain point, but after the completion of term of office of the officer in Belgrade, the process came to a standstill. Finally, the administrative integration of four northern municipalities could be said to be successful, as well as local elections and forming local authorities as a result. Although with incidents, the first election cycle was organized on the foundations of the Brussels Agreement, fundamental democratic procedures were observed and thus the purpose of the agreement was achieved.

Contrary to that, the implementation of other agreements encountered a number of obstacles preventing their optimum implementation:

- exchange of cadastral and registry books has not been fully completed and it is subject to frequent interruptions in the synchronization process;
- Association of Serb-majority municipalities has not been formed, and stage one of the process was interrupted by a Decision of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo on non-constitutionality of certain items of the Brussels Agreement ³⁵;

³⁵ KosSev, Kosovski ustavni sud suspendovao sporazum o Zajednici srpskih opština, 10 November 2015, available on: <https://kossev.info/kosovski-ustavni-sud-suspendovao-sporazum-o-zajednici-srpskih-opština/>

- no progress has been made in the sphere of energy, Mitrovica bridge revitalization and mutual recognition of diplomas.

In addition to processes directly related to the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, certain events significantly affected the pace and nature of the normalization process:

- the opposition protest in Kosovo against establishing the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities (October 2015 and January 2016),
- arrest of prime minister Ramush Haradinaj in France and raising tensions due to an attempt to bring a (politically) painted train to Mitrovica North from Belgrade (January 2017),
- murder of the politician Oliver Ivanović (January 2018),
- imposition of tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (November 2018),
- as well as many more.

Another decisive factor that contributed to a limited success of the dialogue is non-distancing from the inclusion of nationalistic and verbally inflammatory narrative in the dialogue process. Such tendencies are frequently supported and intensified by aggressive rhetoric propagated by certain media and, putting at risk fragile inter-ethnic relations. Despite the lessons learnt and devastating consequences of the role of media during the 2004 March incidents ³⁶, the negotiation process which should lead to reconciliation and prosperity of Kosovo and the region and all its citizens, nevertheless has not been meant to be completed. The dialogue is the best alternative to violent conflicts and rows, and its sabotaging cannot bring benefits to the confronted parties.

³⁶ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, The Representative on Freedom of the Media Miklós Haraszti, Report: The Role of the Media in the March 2004 Events in Kosovo, 2004, available on: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/8/30265.pdf>

Aim and methodology of the research

The aim of the research activities that are the basis of the study was to determine authentic views, perceptions and interests of the Kosovo Serb community in the process of dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. This implied an overview of consequences caused by the decisions made in the negotiation process and implemented in practice, as well as the attitude to the continuation and future of the dialogue and prospects of Kosovo Serbs. This community was directly affected by the process of implementation of decisions made within the Brussels negotiating format. In a position between Pristina and Belgrade, without political representatives to represent their authentic interests, this community was not offered to take part effectively and proactively in the process of designing negotiating strategies and making decisions. Due to a lack of feedback on the dialogue process, i. e. perceptions and views regarding implications it had had on this community, this study placed focus on Kosovo Serbs. The study was done and research conducted with the participation of citizens of Serb ethnicity, as well as political analysts, representatives of the non-governmental sector and media who were also consulted on relevant topics. Prior to commencing field data gathering, the selected four-member team (lead researcher, legal advisor, political advisor, editor) conducted a basic research on the legal, political and socio-economic aspects of the dialogue in the light of its success/failure and implications it had had on the Kosovo Serb community. The partners who took part in the study organized eight focus groups in total. As part of the data gathering process, NGO AKTIV organized four focus groups in the north of Kosovo, while FDMC was assigned a task of organizing the remaining four focus groups in Serb-majority places south of the Ibar/Ibër. For the purpose of in-depth information collection there were twelve interviews with key protagonists from the Kosovo Serb community, who are experts in the dialogue process and the spheres narrowly connected with the study topic.

Finally, it should be noted that perceptions and views of Kosovo Serbs on the dialogue process between Belgrade and Pristina are deduced exclusively based on the research activities. Kosovo Serbs were encouraged during the research to talk freely on the consequences the dialogue/normalization process had on them against a possibility of giving proposals and suggestions for its modification or a complete change.

Methodology and design of quantitative research

The field face-to-face survey was conducted in the period from 1 October through 20 October 2020. In total, 582 citizens of Serb ethnicity on the entire territory of Kosovo were included in the survey. Out of that, 50.5 % of respondents south of the Ibar/Ibër and 49.5 % of respondents north of the Ibar/Ibër were included in the survey. The questionnaire consisted of 65 questions covering 8 areas. Sampling was non-random and quota, and the quota determining criterion was the size of population of a municipality. Confidence interval was +/-5. The sample included 54.7 % of men and 45.3 % of women. The average age of respondents was 44. Out of the total number, 14.4 % of respondents were with completed elementary school, 62.1 % with completed secondary school and 23.5 % of respondents were with completed higher school or faculty. Out of the total number of respondents, 25.9% were employed in the public sector, 22.3% in the private sector, 35.2% were unemployed and 16.6% were retired. It is important to point out that due to the fact there are no statistical data on the demographic structure of the targeted population, i. e. Serb population in Kosovo, it could only conditionally be deemed a representative sample.

Methodology and design of qualitative research

FOCUS GROUPS

Time:

The research was conducted from 1 September 2020 until 28 November 2020

Research instrument:

13-question talk guide

Number of focus groups:

8 focus groups

Total number of participants:

80 participants (10 participants in each focus group)

Participant selection criterion:

place of residence, level of education, sex, age, professional competence

INTERVIEWS

Time

The research was conducted from 1 September 2020 until 20 November 2020

Total number of interviewees

10-question interview guide

Total number of interviewees:

12 interviewees

Participant selection criterion:

place of residence, professional competence, sphere of interest/activities

Respondents:

anonymous

Dialogue from the perspective of Kosovo Serbs: perceptions and trends

Aimed at a comprehensive gathering of information on the perceptions and views of the members of Kosovo Serb community relating to the process of normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, the research results are presented

from the present and future time perspectives and two aspects (expert and non-expert). Results of the research conducted by applying qualitative and quantitative methods and divided into key areas mapped in the course of research activities are presented below. Separate subject-related areas are the result of separation of key subjects observed in the research, shaped by the quantity and quality of information communicated by the respondents.

Overview of the Brussels dialogue process until now: population and experts

Informedness and transparency

Focus group participants and experts point out that, to the extent it is available to them, they regularly inform themselves on developments in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina due to a fact that Kosovo Serbs are directly affected by all decisions made. This fact was also confirmed during surveying the members of the Kosovo Serb community south of the Ibar/Ibër (see graph 1). However, as it has been said on several occasions, information on the process, topics and results of the dialogue are mainly brief and general due to a non-transparent nature of

the process itself and absence of desire of key negotiators to explain publicly the essence of what is agreed. Moreover, as they cannot speak

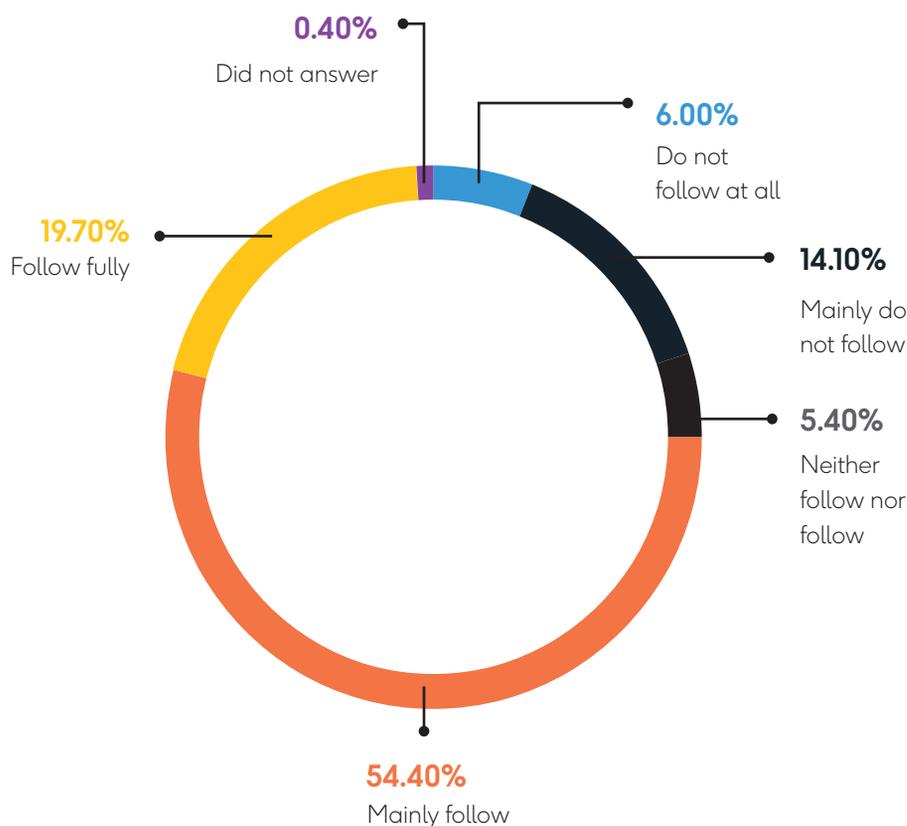
Whether we want that or not, we are affected by the topics and consequences of the dialogue.

focus group participant

Albanian, Kosovo Serbs are exclusively informed by media publishing news on the dialogue in Serbian, mainly those from Belgrade, and, as consequence, they frequently do not understand the local context in reporting on the implications of agreement implemen-

tation on the spot. Under such circumstances, it is extremely difficult to find the right, i. e. objective, media reports on the dialogue.

Graph 1. Informedness of citizens on the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina



Majority of participants of focus groups confirm they know when the negotiations commenced, which representatives of Pristina and Belgrade were in Brussels. The respondents also say they do not have information on the exact number of signed agreements, yet they are familiar with the content of some of them. Some of the participants mention 30 as an approximate number of agreements signed in Brussels. The rest of them are familiar with the 2013 Brussels Agreement, as one, in their opinion, of the key documents providing for integration of northern municipalities in the Kosovo system. Information on the dialogue are mainly obtained through Belgrade media which, the participants say, is how they are regularly informed, although, in their opinion, those media are not familiar enough with the local context and often in the information collection process oversee the necessity/need to consult local population, as well as reporting on the spot.

As to a general view on the dialogue, there is an absolute agreement among the respondents that it is in the essence non-transparent and that the overall narrative is burdened with political competing and verbal conflicts among the representatives of Belgrade and Pristina. In the atmosphere of full politicization of negotiations, objective information on the content and progress of dialogue are overshadowed and thus a gap between Kosovo Serbs and Albanians even more deepened, who become recipients of information with exclusive political connotation and not objective information. A smaller number of respondents say the reason of non-transparency is the fact that the issue of Kosovo status is too sensitive for the citizens of Kosovo and Serbia which led to a halt in negotiations. Or, to quote one of focus group participants: "Serbia is not going to recognize the independence of Kosovo and for that reason Belgrade has (benevolently) tried to conceal partly less difficult issues from the public in Serbia".

In talks with citizens, beside non-transparency and limited information on the dialogue, the absence of interest of citizens to get informed on

the dialogue and its process is pointed out as a quite present tendency. It is said that certain parts of the society are not fully familiar with the dialogue unlike those who, due to the nature of the work they do, are. "Ordinary citizens do not know what is being discussed at the negotiating table", and based on available information "we cannot be fully informed on who negotiates and what is negotiated". The research shows that younger generations are not at all familiar with the dialogue process. What is known to everyone is that the dialogue takes place in Brussels, but it is not known what it actually means and what its objectives are, and the latter is in fact the primary reason of the lack of interest of the young for the subject matter of the dialogue.

In support of a widespread opinion among the members of Kosovo Serb communities on the absence of transparency and shortage of objective and full information, the results of the survey show that 67% of respondents agree with the claim that the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is conducted non-transparently and consequently this community lacks right information on what is actually agreed in Brussels. Therefore, despite the fact the population is interested in the dialogue, information they get through media do not make it possible for them to have sufficient knowledge on the overall process.

Integration

The research shows that there is a unanimous belief among Kosovo Serbs the dialogue has not improved the process of integration of Serbs into Kosovo society. The respondents say their discomfort is caused by the fact that such society, as they point out, currently does not exist, as, from the perspective of the Serb community, it is exclusively mono-ethnic and non-inclusive. The entire process of implementation of the agreement has left Serbs with no choice as the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina facilitated only institutional integration in the Kosovo system. In that light, the respondents point out that formal legal preconditions for participation in political representation and democratic decision-making (at local and central



The dialogue has not contributed to integration. Integration is not only formal and political, it should be essential and there is no such integration. Kosovo society does not want its Serb part which, in its essence, is an integral part of that society, but it is constantly, radically being cut off and rejected.

political scientist from one of the municipalities south of the Ibar/Ibër with the Serb-majority population

level) anticipated for members of non-majority communities have been met, but this advancement enabled by the dialogue of negotiating parties has not essentially supported the process of integration of the Serbs into Kosovo society. An affirmation of such widely spread views is also found in the survey results showing that **62,8 %** of respondents believe that the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade yields more benefits to the Albanians than the Serbs in Kosovo, and the same view is shared by **66,5 %** of respondents with completed higher education.

Even if Kosovo Serbs wished to get involved proactively in the integration into Kosovo society, the majority of respondents state that the language and cultural barrier (which, as it is stated, exists between them and the majority community) would further demotivate members of this community in their desire to participate in the social life of Kosovo. What is interesting is that unanimity could be noticed regarding the financial dimension of this issue. One of focus group participants from the north of Kosovo summarized this broadly present view in a sentence: "Even if I wanted, for instance, to go to a concert or cultural event in the south, it would take a lot of money to get there and I cannot afford that". The respondents and experts agree that the integration of Kosovo Serbs is reduced to participation in political activities in Kosovo which for local population mainly means participation in voting process and interaction in resolving administrative



Some of the signed agreements did contribute to a greater participation of the Serbs in the Kosovo system. For example, the agreement on judiciary. Yet, even in this case it is not about a proper integration but about an adaptation, as it is the case with other agreements, because people are usually not asked if they want something. An agreement is made first and then people adapt to the agreement. Thus, there is no essential inclusion of the Serbs in the Kosovo system, it is only about taking part.

lawyer

matters with local and central level administration bodies. Finally, it is pointed out that Kosovo Serbs are demotivated to integrate fully and that the dialogue process has motivated only representatives of NGOs to take part in debates, discussions and public fora, while the rest of the population is entirely passive.

Experts in the field of law interviewed during the research point out that negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade significantly facilitated integration of the Serbs when judiciary integration is concerned. Judiciary integration process has led to an improvement in the work of courts and therefore speeded up deciding on cases which, due to the existence of parallel systems, were not decided. Focus group participants agree with this view, adding frequently that the dialogue has had an impact on the integration only in case of this field and that the process itself has many flaws.

On the other hand, a non-harmonized and sometimes hypocritical position of the representatives of central-level institutions, in particular the Government of Kosovo, is stated as one of the main reasons of non-integration of the Serbs into the Kosovo system. Although representatives of the government constantly point out the impor-

tance of integration of this community into the Kosovo system, the respondents do not recognize a genuine will and efforts of the government in making the integration actually take place. As it is often pointed out, there is a misconception among the representatives of the central level authority that integration of one non-majority community is successfully implemented only because its representatives participate in the work of and are part of (Kosovo) institutions. A process of integration of one community into a certain system is a "complex and long-standing process requiring exceptional sacrifices and adaptations", is how it is seen from the perspective of Kosovo Serbs. Due to that, the respondents expressed an opinion in the research that the process of normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade is, as such, only one in a series of factors that have had a direct impact on

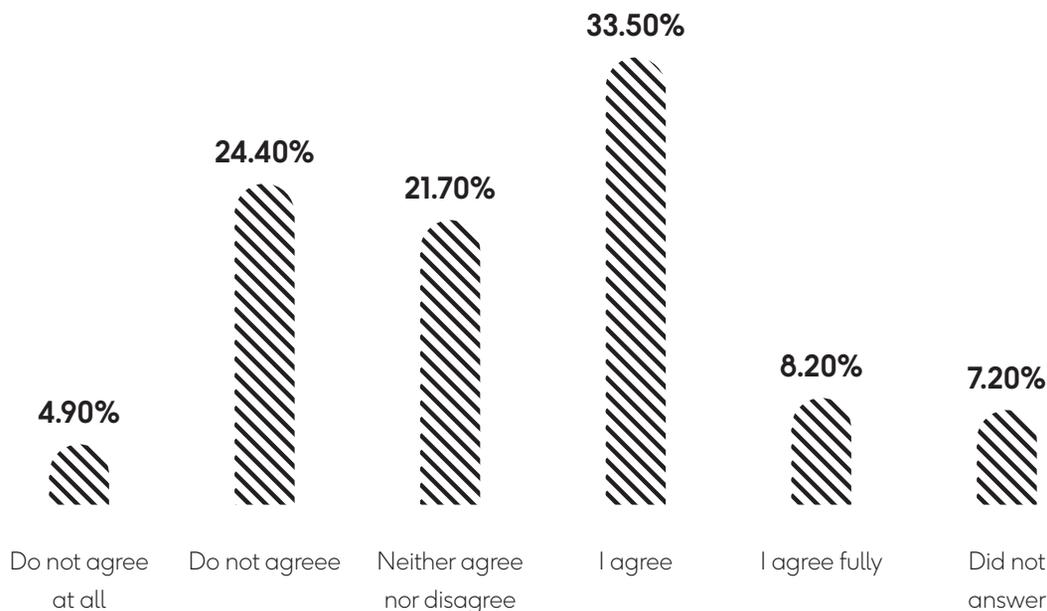
integration. In that sense, the research shows that the dialogue has not been recognized as a key factor of the inclusion of the Kosovo Serb community into the legal and administrative system of Kosovo. Moreover, as the public opinion survey shows, polarized views on the impact of the dialogue on the array of rights available to members of this community indicate that the integration process is still underway and that it is not unambiguous.



The Serbs were and are on the social and socio-economic periphery in Kosovo.

journalist

Grafiku 2. Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has had an impact on the reduction of the array of rights and quality of life of the Serbs



The impact of agreements on the life of ordinary citizens and life in the community

The greatest number of respondents marked the Brussels dialogue as having a negative impact on the Serb community in Kosovo, as, on the one hand, they have been constantly in the media and political focus, while, on the other hand, little has been implemented. It is pointed out that the negotiations have had a negative "psychical, not only physical impact on the Serb community in Kosovo", no matter whether it is area south or north of the Ibar/Ibër. In their explanation of the adverse individual and collective attributes of the impact of the dialogue, they shared a number of personal negative experiences they have had since the period of implementation of the Brussels agreements:

Telecommunications. It is found that there are frequent problems with the availability of *mts d.o.o.* network in the north of Kosovo, while south of the Ibar/Ibër the situation is even more drastic due to range limitation ("It is shameful and discriminating that the base station network south of the Ibar/Ibër is of such limited range", says one of the focus group participants), whereas costs of *mts d.o.o.* services are higher than in Serbia. Additional costs and great limitation in the use of *mts d.o.o.* services are seen by the respondents as crucial proof

Freedom of movement. As it is frequently stated, a majority of population has already somehow adapted to the situation created by the implementation of the agreement (on freedom of movement). The greatest number of respondents possess more than one type of documents and they are, as it is pointed out, „adapting to the situation as required by the circumstances" which „has become a routine in their everyday life". However, the adaptability does not resolve the issue of discrimination which, as it is emphasized in focus groups, Kosovo Serbs feel due to the situation in which they unwillingly found themselves, and in which they are equally discriminated against by Kosovo and Serbian institutions either due to documents or due to moving over crossings. Contrary to that, a lawyer from Gračanica/Graçanicë



Seemingly there is freedom of, but it is not actual. Freedom of movement is greater, but costs of movement are higher as well. No one except us is forced to choose, as dictated by the circumstances, among as many as three types of documents.

focus group participant

Municipality, talking about the absence of a direct effect of the dialogue on the change of lives of the entire Serb community in Kosovo, points out that the only actual relief for the Serb population in Kosovo is a mutual recognition of documents. This step, as he says, is of great importance for those citizens of Kosovo who travel frequently and have links with Serbia.

Integration of judiciary and police in the north.

As respondents from the north of Kosovo state, judiciary integration has only worsened the overall situation. In summarizing a general view, one of the focus group participants describes dissatisfaction over the agreement implementation as follows: "Paper work is disastrous, translations into Serbian are frequently poor and inadequate, whereas issuance of documents is even more complicated". According to the Serbs living both south and north of the Ibar/Ibër, only those who got employed have benefited, i. e. those who got integrated into the new system. What makes the problem worse is the fact that judiciary systems of Kosovo and Serbia do not have official communication channels and ordinary citizens may struggle due to a conflict of competences and lack of cooperation between the judiciary bodies. On the other hand, there is a certain level of confidence in the integrated Kosovo police in the north and south, but only and exclusively because "there is a significant number of Kosovo Serbs among them" in the Serb-majority communities. The police are criticized in the focus groups mainly over passivity and poor efficiency in the light of frequent security incidents taking place lately (during COVID-19

pandemic) in the Serb-populated communities (not only in the Serb-majority communities).

Education. Verification of diplomas poses a huge problem to young Kosovo Serbs who would like to stay in Kosovo and get employment there. Administrative process is, as pointed out by younger respondents who completed higher education, too complicated and slow ("to many instances are included in the overall process"). On the one hand, this fact is a demotivating factor for the young and on the other, it additionally speeds up decisions by the young to leave Kosovo and seek places with a better economic and social atmosphere.

The results of the survey support a negative perception of the impact of negotiation process on the life of Serbs in Kosovo, yet not to an extent in which it is present among focus group members. Although a significant number – **48.8 %** of respondents (**35.5 %** affirmatively and **13.3 %** fully affirmatively) – agree with the statement that the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has had a negative effect on the position of Serbs in Kosovo, **24.3 %** states a different opinion. Indecisiveness of respondents accounting for almost one quarter (**23.5 %**) shows there are doubts among the population as to a (potential) causation between the decisions made in the course of negotiations and the improved/deteriorated conditions of life of Kosovo Serbs. However, differences in opinion regarding this question are noticed among the citizens from the north of Kosovo where **42.6 %** of respondents agree on the negative view of the dialogue (with a high percentage of the indecisive – **32.1 %**), and from the south, where the percentage is significantly higher – **54.9 %**, with the twice lower percentage of the indecisive – **15 %**. It is also interesting that a high percentage of negative opinion of the dialogue is present among persons with stable economic circumstances – **55.6 %**.

Interethnic relations

The survey conducted among the members of the Kosovo Serb community shows that the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade has not improved cooperation and lowered ethnic tensions between



Lowering tensions is obvious as incidents are much fewer than when we did not talk. On the other hand, the international observing mission places a kind of responsibility on Albanians to act more responsibly and to be more open to other communities, which is positive.

non-governmental sector activist

the Serb and Albanian community in Kosovo. More than a half of the respondents (**51.6 %**) say the dialog has not improved interethnic relations even two decades after the armed conflicts ceased. Approximately the same number of respondents are those who are indecisive regarding that question (**22.5 %**), and those who find the impact of the dialogue has improved interethnic relations (**19.7 %**), which is an indication that the population still do not understand the causality between the negotiation process and relations among communities.

The majority of focus group participants are unanimous that the dialogue has not had a direct impact on interethnic relations between the Serb and Albanian community. When it is about the members of the Serb community living in the north (with the exception of Mitrovica North), such position partly results from the fact that the Albanian community is not numerous in northern municipalities. In the case of Mitrovica North as one of rare multiethnic communities in Kosovo, focus group participants and the interviewed experts point out that relations are relatively good and that in that sense the dialogue has had no impact at all on a partial improvement of relations between the communities. When Kosovo as a whole is concerned, collocutors agree and conclude that the dialogue has neither had an adverse nor positive impact on the reconciliation process, as, according to them, this process actually has not commenced. What is noticed by the respondents is that the dialogue has had a significant impact on the segment of institutional communi-

cation with Pristina, which, in the period prior to the agreement signing and implementation, was not of high intensity. The cooperation between members of different communities within institutions resulted in new communication channels, yet they have not necessarily contributed to an overall improvement in interethnic relations.

When this question is concerned, the perceptions of the Serbs south and north of the Ibar/Ibër slightly differ because those in the south have more frequent contacts with the members of the majority and other communities. However, they have something in common and that is their opinion that there is no immediate causality in the change in nature or pace in the relations between the communities in Kosovo. Views on the reconciliation process and impact of the dialogue are also the same, which is that there is still no essential reconciliation and that the absence of political will is one of major impediments to that.

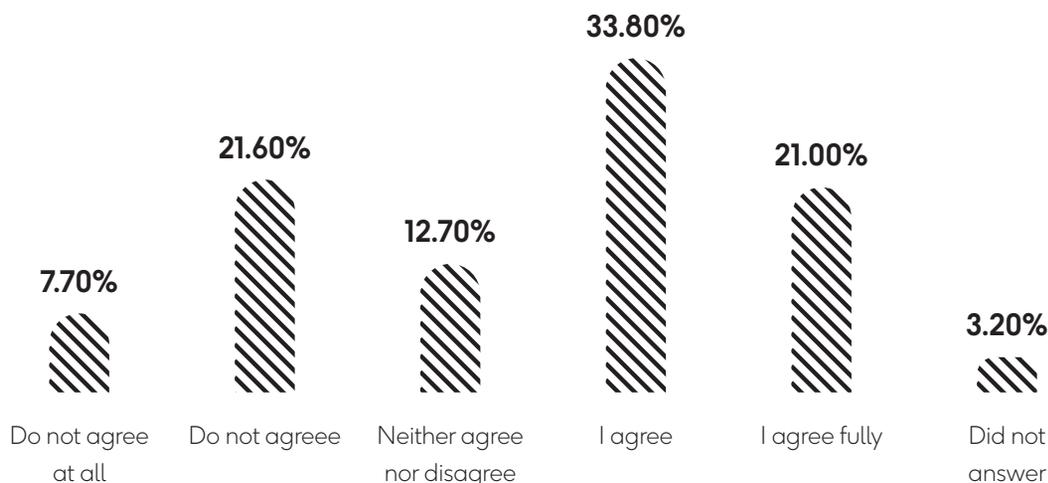
Negotiating parties and mediators

Not counting Belgrade, the collocutors point out other negotiation participants as disruptive factors in the achievement of a sustainable, stable and safe life of the Serbs Kosovo-wide. In spite of the absence of a consultative approach of Belgrade

and frequent nonunderstanding the (specific) local context, the participants unanimously state this party as the only one protecting the interests of this community in Kosovo and internationally alike. While talking on the negotiating parties, the narrative of a potential exchange of territories which was at one point part of dialogue discourse was mentioned; the participants point out that a veil of secrecy over what such solution spread discomfort among the members of the Serb community both south and north of the Ibar/Ibër as it was not known what would be the line along which the so called demarcation would be made. That, at least for a certain period of time, partly shook the trust in Belgrade.

Contrary to that, a part of the surveyed citizens express mistrust to the manner in which Belgrade represented the interests of Kosovo Serbs during Brussels negotiations. The results of the public opinion show that more than a half of the Serbs (54.8 %) assess as negative the efforts of Serbian negotiating team in representing and protecting the authentic interests of this non-majority community. Respondents in the north of Kosovo (63 %) are more critical than the Serbs south of the Ibar/Ibër (46.7 %) of how Belgrade represented the interests of Serbs. As an illustration of this territorial difference, 36 % of the surveyed in the south

Graph 3: In the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina the Serbian negotiating team did not represent the interests of Kosovo Serbs the right way



assess the activities of Belgrade in representing them positively, whereas in the north the percentage is somewhat lower – **22.3%**. It is also found in the survey that **70.1%** of respondents employed in the private sector assess Belgrade's involvement in representing the interests of Kosovo Serbs negatively, while citizens above the age of **66 – 52 %** have the opposite view.

Respondents point out that EU mediating role in the negotiations did not at all affect the attitude of Kosovo Serbs to other communities and EU institutions. The EU is said to be insufficiently mature for such a "big bite as solving the Kosovo issue is", having as a consequence a widely spread negative attitude to the dialogue and the principal mediator. Irrespective of who might have been a mediator in the dialogue, participants believe that a significant improvement in the relations between the Serbs and the Albanians in Kosovo would not have been made. The same is in case of the attitude of Serbs to Kosovo institutions, because, as it is said, "the damage to the Serbs in Kosovo has been made and a change of a mediator would only worsen the situation". Contrary to that, the experts state that the negotiation parties do not have the "same starting position" and their views as to issue solving are diametrically opposite. That limits the role of mediator significantly. That is why, they claim, the only success made with Brussel's mediation was dealing with the barriers of technical nature which could be solved hadn't there been stepping into more demanding spheres with political context. The biggest objection to the EU is allowing the so-called "negotiating behind closed doors". Such act, as it is stated, is disrespectful not only to the Serb, but to other communities in Kosovo as well. As believed by our collocutors, the negotiating parties are to be blamed for such disrespect and non-transparency, because they "represent their personal interests and not the interests of communities living in Kosovo". In addition to that, the experts point out that shifting the dialogue from technical to a higher (political) level was a big mistake and a confirmation of the thesis stated in focus groups. Interference of political interests of main negotiators from Belgrade and Pristina disabled the full poten-



Any problem-solving is an outcome of giving in by one or the other party, and not a reaching a compromise as it should be.

focus group participant



The European Union did not prove to be a good mediator in the dialogue process. As a reason I see the fact that the EU does not have a big influence on any of the negotiating parties.

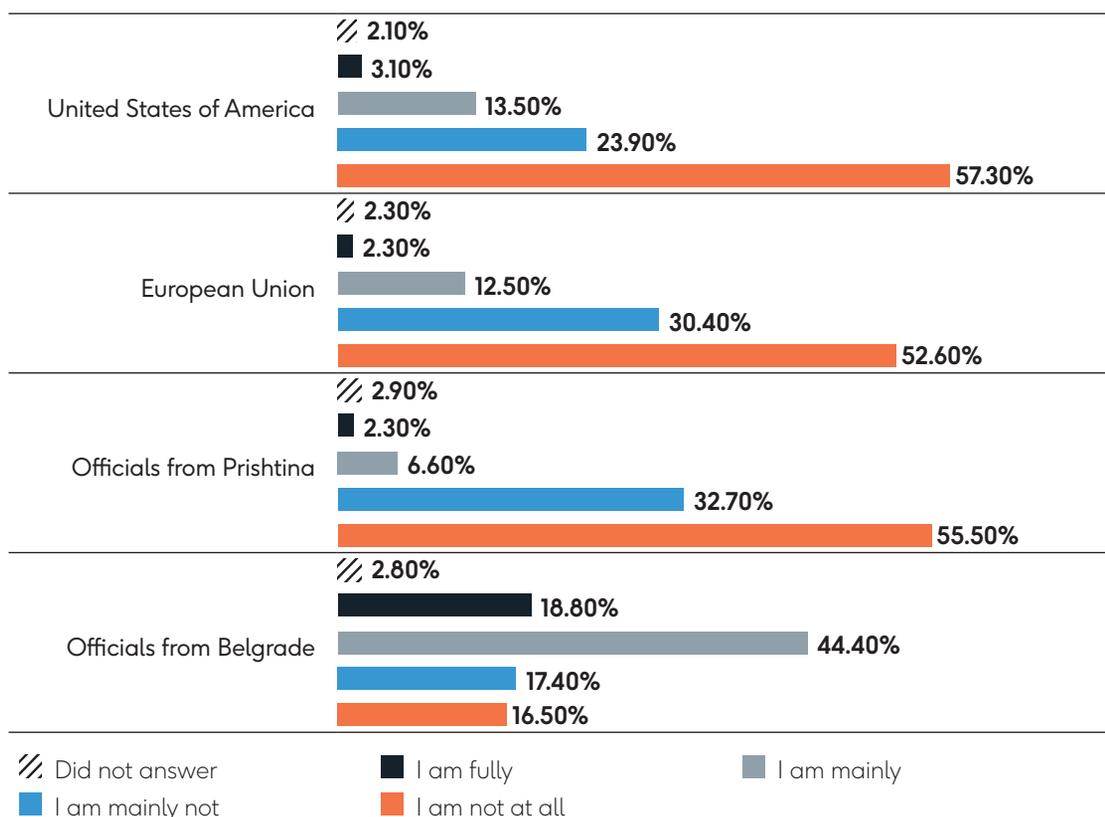
focus group participant

tial of negotiations created while they were held at technical level.

Talking on a possibility that Pristina might accept to represent the authentic interests of Serbs from Kosovo (with consultations with local population) when the dialogue continues, the experts pointed out that this negotiating party has no desire to improve the position of the Serbs and that, as one of them claims, "for that reason it cannot at this moment represent the interests" of this community. He added that "representatives of Belgrade are permissive, whereas representatives of Pristina have maximalist requirements based on nationalistic motives", leaving no maneuvering space toward a consensus on key issues. Moreover, at the time of certain rivalry between the EU and the USA regarding mediation in the dialogue, a political scientist from Belgrade versed in the circumstances in Kosovo emphasizes that "it [rivalry] only adds to confusion in understanding the process and transparency of the outcome", as well as that he does not believe that this type of competition affects the confidence in dialogue as it is constantly at a low level, no matter what".

The presented similar views on confidence in the negotiating and mediating parties are reflected

Graph 4. How confident are you in the following protagonists of the Brussels dialogue?



in the survey conducted among Kosovo Serbs. While confidence in Belgrade is the highest among respondents (**63.2%**), a high degree of mistrust is shown toward Pristina (**88.2%**), the EU (**83%**) and the USA (**81.2%**).

Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities

The absolute majority of collocutors are not informed in detail on the A/CSM concept and it is not clear to them what the competences of this body would be. The very fact that A/CSM has not been established yet is one of main arguments of the respondents why the dialogue is not successful. However, it is emphasized that in the period following signing the agreement on A/CSM establishment there was a chance of a sustainable institutional solution for Kosovo Serbs (and of it potentially improving their living conditions in Kosovo), as well as that postponing and refusal to set it up distanced the population from the idea of

A/CSM as an optimum solution. In the event the A/CSM becomes again a key issue in the negotiations, Belgrade should insist on maintaining soft institutions in Kosovo financed by Serbia, as, it is pointed out, they are "a guarantee of the stay of Serbs in Kosovo". On the other hand, leaving sufficient space for immediate communication with Kosovo institutions would be of exceptional importance, and would mean, as it is said "a win-win situation".

A key argument in favor of setting up the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities stated during the survey is that this move would enable institutional stability to the Serb population and its stay in Kosovo (as well as the return of the displaced persons). However, due to the fact that A/CSM is not set up, and that there is a pronounced distancing of Pristina from the obligations under the signed agreements, most of the collocutors point out that they doubt the

(under pressure) set up A/CSM would protect vital interests of the Serb community, and even more that it would improve the relations with the majority community or reinforce the integration process and communication with central-level institutions. Respondents believe that a compromise regarding the A/CSM will not be made soon and that setting up of this body is practically a „mission impossible”. There is an impression that there is a pronounced and strong desire to set up such institution due to a lack of institutional, social, economic and cultural security of Kosovo Serbs. Some participants added that it is necessary to establish an additional number of (Serb-majority) municipalities to guarantee the stay of Serbs living in the enclaves south of the Ibar/Ibër and include them in the A/CSM. Thus, the focus groups comprised of citizens living south of the Ibar/Ibër propose setting up of municipalities comprising predominantly Serb-populated places, such as Priluzje/Prelluzha, Plemetina/i and Babin Most/Babimoc.

A significant number of focus group participants living out of (or coming by origin from) the municipalities that would potentially be part of the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities expressed a fear that setting up that territorial-administrative unit would exclude and additionally isolate Kosovo Serbs living out of the Serb-majority municipalities. It is pointed out that the population of places like Velika Hoča/ Hoçë e Madhe, Šilovo/Shillova, Goraždevac/Gorazhdec, Plemetina/i, Priluzje/Prelluzha, Babin Most/Babimoc, Donja Brnjica/Bërnice e Poshtme, Kuzmin and Suvo Grlo/Syriganë would not be equal in relation to the Serbs from the municipalities being potential A/CSM members.

Experts and certain participants of focus groups expressed a fear that a possible setting up the A/CSM would become a mechanism of *extinguishing all Serbian institutions in Kosovo*. One of local activists in municipalities south of the Ibar/Ibër says: “I see the A/CSM as an end of all institutions which could be a reason of the stay of the Serbs as an ethnic group in Kosovo. It is a smoke screen

aimed at dissolving the remaining institutions of the Republic of Serbia.” His counterpart from the north emphasizes that “on paper, the A/CSM is a final act of segregation of the two peoples” and that in “case that the A/CSM agreement is fully implemented, it should be horizontally a third decision-making body in Kosovo”.

Future of the Brussels dialogue: desires and fears

New topics – new opportunities

As it is pointed out several times during the research, the selection of topics to be negotiated in Brussels was not influenced by the Serb community in Kosovo. Due to that, all collocutors said they [the talks] did not substantially cover some of key issues faced by Kosovo Serbs. That is why the respondents were asked to propose topics to be dealt with potentially by the negotiating parties and which are priorities for the Kosovo Serb community. Out of a great number of topics proposed by the focus group participants, three of them prove to be of key importance, as well as the areas to be talked about in the future, and which would in return motivate Kosovo Serbs to have more confidence in institutions and other communities in Kosovo:

- Resolving the issue of the missing and kidnapped (in the 1998-2004 period) and provision of sustainable conditions for a smooth and safe return (at least of a part) of displaced persons with strong guarantees of the international community and key factors for transitional justice fostering;
- Speeding up resolving the outstanding private proprietary relations issues and usurpation of property owned by the Serbs;
- Sustainable protection of Serb cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo through a greater presence of international security forces and establishing an effective legal and constitutional protection of immovable cultural goods.

When it is about transitional justice, it is pointed out that it is still subordinated to "the wall dividing the communities in Kosovo". As a consequence, "there is a fear within the communities from each other, and there is cooperation only when it is necessary and cannot be avoided" due to a fact that two decades have been lost without significant advancements toward a sustainable reconciliation based on the established facts on the victims of war. A necessary condition for that is trying the responsible (from the KLA) for the crimes committed which has not been done, as the majority of respondents say, due to the absence of justice for the victims of Serb ethnicity.

One of the key components, as the respondents put it, and a precondition for building better relations between the communities and fostering confidence in (Kosovo) institutions, is overcoming barriers that have been ("for too long") on the way to returning the usurped property to its legal owners. The absence of political will to resolve this key issue is perceived as the main cause of a long-standing halt in progress in observing one of the fundamental human rights – protection and inalienability of private property. According to the interviewed experts, abuses of this right are indicative of the inability of central level institutions in Kosovo to exercise powers vested in them by the law. Moreover, the fact that the aggrieved parties are members of a non-majority community shows that there is institutional discriminating against the Serb community.

Protection and preservation of cultural and religious heritage closely related to the history and identity of the Serbs in Kosovo proved to be one of difficult issues of interest for this community. Declarative and institutional protection of the heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as the respondents claim, is insufficient for its preservation, making it is an easy target to extremist elements of the Kosovo society. In that sense, a number of practical proposals was given during the research how to ensure a sustainable protection of churches, monasteries and buildings of great importance for the Serbs, such as extraterritoriality of immov-

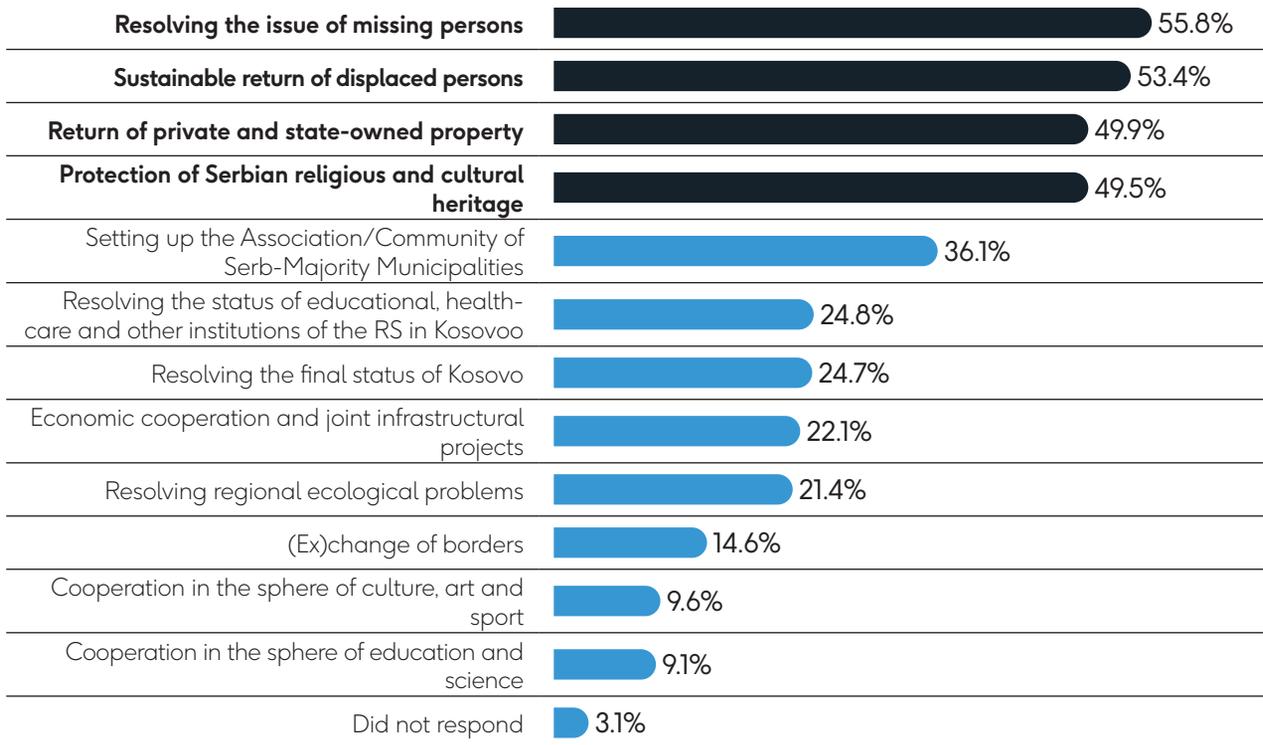
able property and involvement of security forces comprised of members of an international mission (such as KFOR).

Beside the topics of essence for this community mentioned in the research, the participants also stated areas believed to be of highest priority in the negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade, the resolving of which might improve the living conditions of the Serbs in Kosovo:

- recognition of documents issued by the Serbian Coordination Directorate by the Kosovo central-level institutions;
- agreement on socially-owned property in Kosovo which, as claimed by the respondents, is the ownership of the Republic of Serbia (energy and water-supply capacities of Lake Gazivode/Ujmani, Obilić thermal power station, Šar/Sharr Mountain National Park etc.);
- determining objective standards for the assistance of the Republic of Serbia to this community in Kosovo to end unreasonable and irrational spending of subsidies "by those they are not intended to", as it is repeated in focus groups several times;
- greater use of the Serbian language in Kosovo, especially in institutions;
- provision of more space for the participation of the Serbs in the decision-making process at the local and central level;
- automatic granting dual citizenship for the members of Serb community in Kosovo;
- smooth functioning of the healthcare system within the system of Serbia in Kosovo;
- full constitutional and legal protection of the Serbs from majorization by the Albanian majority;
- setting up the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities with executive powers and special relations with Serbia.

According to the results of the survey, priority topics in the continuation of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as seen by the citizens, do not differ significantly from the feedback from focus groups and interviews. Four topics mentioned

Graph 5. List of the proposed topics of exceptional importance for the continuation of dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina



by a half or more of the respondents are identical to three key priorities stated in focus groups and interviews. Other topics are significantly less favored by the respondents, first among them is setting up the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities. In addition to these topics, it is important to point out that priorities in resolving the final status of Kosovo and soft institutions, as well as fostering economic-infrastructural and ecological cooperation are observed as important for the respondents.

Territory swap

Among fears noticed during the research, mostly among the respondents living south of the Ibar/Ibër, are announcements of potential demarcation. Despite the fact that none of the negotiating parties clearly explained what actually the supposed plan on territorial changes meant, the respondents demonstrated certain anxiety over

the potential scenario in circulation for the past two and a half years. Irrespective of what term is used for a potential solution of the Kosovo status issue – territory swap, demarcation, border correction or similar, the respondents openly stated their opposing to pursuance of any non-transparent plan which would be detrimental to the entire community of Serbs in Kosovo.

For respondents south of the Ibar/Ibër any type of a similar scenario is the last step toward a full independence of Kosovo, and a significant diminishing of the rights of this community provided for by the constitution and laws. Moreover, as they pointed out, a potential demarcation by establishing a border on the Ibar/Ibër, would additionally destabilize "the unity of Serb people in Kosovo", and drastically speed up the migration from Kosovo of the Serbs living south of the Ibar/Ibër. This idea, as put by an activist from Gračanica/Gračanicë Municipality is "a consequence of not giving a say to the Serbs from Kosovo in the

dialogue process. If they had been asked, it would have been clear to everyone how nonsensical the idea was. Serbs stay in Kosovo only because they deem themselves to be a part of Serbia. Any change would cause Serb population to leave. This status, although giving them a feeling of uncertainty, nevertheless, offers certain security and that is what keeps them here. If the rights of Serbs are not respected under the existing circumstances, we could imagine what it might be like in case of demarcation”.

A comparatively different opinion was stated by a small number of individuals, in particular among the interviewed experts and some focus group participants from the north, which is that a demarcation, on the one hand, would be based on the fact that municipalities in the north have not been integrated fully in the Kosovo system, whereas on the other, this idea would be legitimate if Serbia “would be given back the territory given to the Autonomous Kosovo-Metohija Region in 1959”. Despite the view of the majority of participants, it is noticed that all respondents fear a possible change of the status quo, which is a territorial entirety of Kosovo that, although fragile, represents a “sustainable and relatively stable framework for the stay of Kosovo Serbs”. The least common denominator in the views on demarcation is summarized by one of the interviewed experts: “This is almost a forgotten topic. Any demarcation of whatever type would mean a collapse of the Serb community south of the Ibar/Ibër. There are already significant displacement processes of the Serb population south of the Ibar/Ibër, and any demarcation would have a very adverse impact on the birth rate of Serb population”.

Final status or final agreement?

The respondents agree that the final status of Kosovo need not be a priority of the negotiating parties and that solving the final status currently is not necessary. Tendencies to agree on the final status of Kosovo push aside technical matters which are currently much more important than the status issue. For that reason the respondents



I believe that retaining the current status is best for Kosovo Serbs. Negotiations should be held at the technical level, solving problems that bother people without discussing the status, as starting points of the Serbs and Albanians are entirely differing, and therefore a final agreement on the status is not possible, without one of the parties not being satisfied at all. I believe that the final agreement including the status issue will not be made. Certainly, issues of technical nature should be discussed.

activist

believe that now it is necessary to revert the dialogue to the technical level as many more matters were agreed upon and resolved at that level than it is the case now with the dialogue taking place at the highest political level.

As experts point out, based on what negotiating parties present to the citizens and based on information available through media, there will be no final status agreement shortly. Currently it is only possible to set up technical groups to deal with key issues encountered by the Serb and other communities in Kosovo. Yet, if a final solution of the issue of Kosovo were offered, it would be imposed, i. e. it would not result from a direct agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. Any imposed solution would only worsen the relations between the Serbs and other communities in Kosovo, and it is believed that it is better to keep the state of affairs as they are now than to accept imposed solutions not benefiting any of the communities. In fear of an imposed solution, there are, as observed during the research, pronounced reservations toward the idea of the final agreement between the negotiating parties. A key argument in favor of the view of the majority of the respondents is their belief that the recognition of independence of Kosovo would be

detrimental to the life of Serbs in Kosovo and that it would automatically cut relations between this community and Serbia (primarily functioning of its soft institutions in Kosovo).

Concerns among the community members caused by a possible final agreement also result from a widespread view that the current status quo is a better alternative to imposed solutions. As the respondents claim, the current circumstances and conditions under which the Serbs live in Kosovo are "far from being ideal", yet they do not lead to a large-scale exodus of this community from Kosovo. However, contrary to this view, certain interviewees believe that a potential comprehensive agreement probably would not lead to a significant deterioration of living conditions of Kosovo Serbs. Moreover, as one of them points out: "A possible agreement would avoid a formal recognition of the independence of Kosovo, however it would unblock Kosovo on the international scene and enable its UN membership. In return, the A/CSM would be set up, a special status for Serb cultural heritage would be defined and proprietary rights over enterprises based in the Serb-majority places would be regulated".

Positioning of Kosovo Serbs in the dialogue process: marginalization and nonunderstanding?

For the participants the dialogue process, i. e. implementation of the signed agreements was not a relevant process until the moment the integration of Serbs into Kosovo institutions began, i. e. when the implementation process started in practice. It is pointed out that the process from the very beginning was implemented without consultations with local population, and sudden changes came as an "unpleasant surprise". Helplessness and fear of forthcoming changes on which they did not have any significant impact prevailed among the Serbs in the north of Kosovo (at the very begin-



Kosovo Serbs are the victims expected by Belgrade to defend the sovereignty of Serbia on the spot, whereas Pristina sees them as a foreign element and second-order citizens. I believe their status will be part of the dialogue, not because of the concern for their staying here, but because dialogue mediators in their "status" see a possibility of the agreement and reaching a compromise between Belgrade and Pristina.

political scientist from Belgrade

ning). Talking about that, it is stated that the local population were angry with Belgrade, as well as with Brussels and Pristina as they (particularly Serbs from the north of Kosovo) were manipulated in a big players' game.

The implementation process of the agreements made in the dialogue had a great impact on the life of Serbs, either individually or collectively, in the north of Kosovo, as well as of those living south of the Ibar/Ibër. One of the participants explained the collective perception of the impact of dialogue on the Serb community in two words: *isolation and stigmatization*, by both Belgrade and Pristina. Although after the process of integration there was certain consolidation of security situation (pretty much limited though), both personal and collective, the participants agreed unanimously that the institutional integration had had an adverse effect on local population – insecure future and non-confidence in the (dualism of) institutions (in the north) of Kosovo. As the process of (institutional-administrative) integration south of the Ibar/Ibër commenced prior to the Brussels agreement and Serbs live there in specific multi-ethnic communities, there was no greater opposing to the inclusion in the Kosovo system. With reference to that, in the course of research activities it is observed that there is a partial discrepancy between the views of respondents south and north of the



Interests of Kosovo Serbs were definitely not presented. Both parties were exclusively focused on "big political interests" and no one was concerned with matters affecting the life of Serbs, everyday life. Besides, there has been no sustainable and continuous presence of authentic Serbs from Kosovo during negotiations both then and now.

political scientist from one of the Serb-majority municipalities south of the Ibar/Ibër

Ibar/Ibër. However, a common denominator when their views are concerned is a rooted and omnipresent perception of a negative impact Brussels negotiations have had on the life of the entire Serb community in Kosovo. Experts are confident that an indirect aim of the dialogue actually is to "cut direct links between the Serbs and the official Belgrade".

In a more in-depth analysis of a prevailing negative attitude of the respondents to the dialogue process it is determined that members of the most numerous non-majority community in Kosovo are frustrated because they were excluded from direct participation and representation in the mediated negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade. Explaining their negative attitude to the dialogue, they state that interests of Kosovo Serbs have not been adequately represented in the negotiation process as there were no detailed and extensive consultations with local population while they were underway. As a consequence, their authentic needs and interests were not met or considered. The survey shows that 47.7 % of respondents believe that the Serbian negotiating team was not interested to listen to the opinion of Kosovo Serbs, whereas 30.5 % of respondents do not agree with that. Contrary to either of these views, 16.2 % of respondents have a neutral position regarding this question.

For the majority of respondents, the crucial problem is that "everything was done secretly". As some of the participants from the north of Kosovo say, a striking example are non-transparent activities of the Development Fund for the North of Kosovo (established during the Brussels dialogue), the purpose of which is economic assistance to this part of Kosovo. A political scientist from the south says that such approach, i. e. talking about Kosovo Serbs as an "object of trade in the negotiations", and the "very fact that the A/CSM, and therefore the rights of Serbs, were negotiated without any result, tells in itself how much the rights of Serbs matter to all parties" involved in the Brussels dialogue. Summarizing the view of his colleagues (the interviewed experts), a civil-sector activist concluded that "Kosovo Serbs are not asked anything, only the highest political representatives in Belgrade. Pristina sees the north of Kosovo as a territory, not its population, while Belgrade sees the north of Kosovo and Serbs living there as an issue to manipulate with". Results of the public opinion research support these claims as 56.7 % of respondents are not familiar with the content of the strategy of the Serbian negotiating team in negotiations with Pristina.

A key conclusion of the talks with respondents is that so far the interests of Kosovo Serbs have not been adequately represented in the dialogue. The reason for that according to them is that Serbs have not had an authentic voice in negotiations and that (as one focus group participant put it) "it is hard to expect that Belgrade, so distant from us physically, would be able to present all issues the Serb community in Kosovo is facing". From the perspective of local population, the selected topics of the Brussels negotiations have not substantially dealt with some of the key issues bothering Serbs. As a consequence, an attempt to solve technical problems did not create preconditions to cope with the most essential issues in the interest of this community.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations are based exclusively on feedback got within the research and they are given to competent institutions, negotiating parties, international players and other relevant protagonists of the negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade:

- Having in mind the fact that 77.7 % of respondents state a need and necessity of the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, it is extremely important to include them in the continuation of negotiations to present the needs and interests of this community in an adequate way.
- Brussels, Belgrade and Pristina need to make additional efforts in solving the issue of missing, killed and kidnapped persons of all ethnicities, i. e. victims of armed conflicts, as a key condition for building up coexistence and fostering reconciliation process.
- Competent judiciary bodies, either at national or international level, need to intensify within a shortest possible period trying those responsible for the crimes committed in the period from 1998 until 2004.
- All parties included in the negotiation process should intensify the process of sustainable return of displaced persons to Kosovo which is at a negligibly low level.
- Kosovo and Serbian judiciary instances need to establish a direct collaboration and communication to speed up the process of resolving the issue of usurpation of property owned by the Serbs, as well as to complete the process of exchange of registry and cadastral books.
- Negotiating parties are obliged to negotiate and solve the issue of personal documents preventing members of all ethnicities in Kosovo to exercise their right of freedom of movement. First steps should be the extension of validity of KS registration plates, as well as finding a constructive solution to the recognition of documents issued by the Coordination Directorate.
- The European Union, in the capacity of a lead mediator, should build up and establish mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of signed agreements and make the continuation of the dialogue transparent and information available to all citizens.
- Belgrade should define objective parameters in deciding on the provision of aid to the poorest members of the Serb community in Kosovo which would stop the irrational and unjustifiable spending of financial subsidies practiced so far and enable giving aid those who need it most.
- Pristina is to enable actual and not only declarative participation of Kosovo Serbs in decision-making processes at local and central levels by observing and improving the rights anticipated for all non-majority communities. To that end, it is necessary to ensure by one of the first interventions a full observance of the right to language and the inalienable right to private property (and its

protection from the undergoing and potential usurpation).

- It is necessary to devise sustainable mechanisms for the protection of the Serb cultural and religious heritage which will be based on agreements between Belgrade and Pristina.
- The European Union and other relevant international actors should prevent and distance themselves from the idea of demarcation. Pristina and Belgrade should make public that there are no non-transparent negotiations that might lead to that outcome.
- Belgrade and Pristina, under the Washington Agreement principles on drawing up a study on the use of capacities of Lake Gazivode/Ujmani, should agree on the competence over socially-owned property in Kosovo over which there are disputes preventing economic and social progress.
- The Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities should be established in accordance with the needs of Kosovo Serbs and exclusively against consultations with local population and based on the defined and agreed upon principles of its setting up.
- The dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade should be constant and not interrupted. The research shows that as many as two thirds of respondents (66.6 %) believe that the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is necessary to improve the quality of life of the Serbs, which should not be neglected by the EU.



Having in mind the fact that **77.7% of respondents state** a need and necessity of the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, it is extremely important to include them in the continuation of negotiations to present the needs and interests of this community in an adequate way.

On the Initiative

"Democracy, Openness and Prospects of the Serb Community in Kosovo – Open" is a new initiative of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS), initiated in 2020. Open is realized in cooperation with nine civil-society organizations that are active in the Serb community in Kosovo.

A general objective of this new initiative is development of an open and dynamic space for discussion within the Serb community and between the Serb and other communities, as well as among institutions in Kosovo.

- The initiative will specifically be engaged in the analysis and estimate of the impact of civil-society and political organizations on the implementation of democratic principles and openness of the Serb community in Kosovo.
- Implementation of democratic standards and the openness of institutions, public policies, and important processes in their relations with the Serb community in Kosovo will be analyzed and estimated, as well a degree of openness of the Serbian community towards them.
- These analyses will assist in understanding the current position and prospects of the Serbian community in Kosovo, serving at the same time as a basis of their argued advocacy among citizens, institutions, local and central authorities, and the international community.

Experienced and established civil-society organizations will make eight (8) sectoral analyses with the purpose of meeting general and specific objectives.

The areas analyzed by our partners in 2020 are as follows:

Media To what extent media in the Serbian language in Kosovo have an impact on the degree of openness, possibility to hear and pluralism of opinions and topics? This area is researched by **Media Center** and **Crno Beli Svet**.

Civil society How civil-society organizations give their contribution to openness and principles of democracy of the Serbian community and generally of Kosovo society? **New Social Initiative** and **Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration** are dealing with this topic.

Political parties Observance of democratic principles and pluralist activism of political parties of the Kosovo Serbs, as well as their openness to participate in the political system of Kosovo and give their contribution to the improvement of public policies. These issues are in the focus of **New Social Initiative and Media Center**.

Responsibility of institutions Better understanding of the position of the Serbian community in Kosovo by observing the openness of the institutions to address the problems of the Serbs. This analysis is made by **Crno Beli Svet** and **Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration**.

Security How the feeling of security affects the openness of the Serbian community to Kosovo security institutions? The answer to this question is sought by **Human Center Mitrovica**.

Economics To what extent are business entities from the communities with Serbian majority open to be integrated in the economy of Kosovo? This area is analyzed by **Institute for Territorial Economic Development**.

Rights of minorities How to get to a more open society through pointing out to the gaps in the implementation of the rights of minorities? This topic is dealt with by **NVO Aktiv** and **Center for the Rights of Minority Communities**.

Process of dialogue and normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia To which extent and which positions of the community of the Kosovo Serbs are represented relating to the impact on and future of the process? **NVO Aktiv** and **Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration** are dealing with this issue.

A consolidated report, „**Characteristics of the open society within Serb community in Kosovo**“, will be published at the end of Open 2020 cycle. It will consolidate results and conclusions from sectoral analysis made by members of Open 2020 initiative into a wider socio-political context of Kosovo.

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