NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA

CITIZENS’ PERSPECTIVE
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SHKURT 2018
TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION 06
METHODOLOGY 07
THE RESULTS OF PUBLIC OPINION POLL 08
QUESTION 10

12 1 Do you think that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should continue without US involvement in the process?
14 2 Do you think that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue will be concluded by 2018?
16 3 Do you expect that Serbia will recognize Kosovo after the dialogue concludes?
18 4 Do you think that the new agreements with Serbia should be discussed in the Assembly before being signed in Brussels?
20 5 In your opinion, did Brussels’s dialogue succeed to improve relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 22
INTRODUCTION

The public opinion poll “Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia: Citizens’ perspective” is the fifth one that KDI has organized to highlight the citizens’ perspective of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process.

The Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue launched in 2011, is expected to enter its third and final phase, under which the parties are expected to sign a legally binding agreement. The pre-entry of this phase, as well as the earlier phases of the dialogue, has been accompanied by numerous controversies, lack of transparency and clarity.

It is not yet known what topics will be discussed or whether other international stakeholders, other than the EU as facilitators, will be directly involved in this process. What will be the negotiating team, what role the country institutions will have, including the Assembly, and what will be the epilogue of this process, are issues that still remain unanswered.

Kosovo’s leadership has urged that this process be concluded as soon as possible, while stating that at the end of the dialogue Serbia will recognize the state of Kosovo. On the other hand, Serbia’s top state officials have dismissed the possibility of recognizing the state of Kosovo by stating that the dialogue between the parties is a compromise process. “It still remains to be seen as to what compromises Kosovo side will be willing to make”.

The most recent case of the criminal act of murder of Oliver Ivanovic, leader of the civic initiative “Freedom, Democracy, Justice” (SDP) in Mitrovica North resulted in the withdrawal of the Serbian side from the technical talks in Brussels. This event highlighted the persisting numerous problems of extending the sovereignty of Kosovo state throughout its territory, also warning that the final phase of the dialogue would be accompanied by a harsh diplomacy of competition as to which party would benefit most from this process.

In this poll, KDI addresses some of these issues from the citizen’s perspective asking their opinion whether the US should be directly involved in this process, if they expect the dialogue to be concluded in 2018 and have formal recognition of the state of Kosovo by the state of Serbia.

Further, this poll highlights the attitude of the citizens about the role that the Assembly must have with regard to the future agreements and, above all, their overall assessment of the 6 years of dialogue - whether this process has really come to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia by improving them.

Based on the findings of the poll, KDI provides recommendations to the country’s institutions to ensure a comprehensive and transparent process of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

These polls are organized under KDI’s mission to promote transparency, accountability and responsible democracy. This project is funded by Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the executive and increasing citizen participation in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

For more information about Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and preliminary polls click on www.votaime.org/Public/Dialog.

2. METHODOLOGY

The poll was developed at the country level using a systematic random method, with a sample of 1070 respondents designed to provide a representative sample, stratified by ethnicity: Albanian, Serbian and non-Serb minorities, coverage by settlements (urban / rural). The poll was conducted during the period 12-20 December 2017. The margin of error is about ± 3%.

These surveys are organized in frame of the KDI mission to promote transparency, accountability and responsible democracy.

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1. In the framework of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi stated through status on his official profile on Facebook, that Kosovo remains committed to the dialogue process for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and in this aspect it is necessary to reach a legally binding agreement for peace and normalization. “See President Thaçi’s full statement on his official Facebook profile.

2. In an autorial article published on 17 August 2017, the President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi has stated that the signing of an Agreement on Normalization and reconciliation between the two states should include mutual recognition as the only way to end all disputes once and for all. See his article “The Last Train for a Sustainable Peace,” 17 August 2017, at: http://www.president-ksgov.net/sq/oped/treni-i-fundit-per-nje-paqe-te-qendrueshme

3. In respect to the dialogue, Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic stated that “somebody has to show good will” understood that compromise means more than just expecting a format where you get everything”. Vucic, “Vucic: if dialogue means recognizing Kosovo – then thanks, bye ”, January 25, 2018 at, http://www.president-vucic.rs/index.php/naslovnica-naslovnica-predsednik-serbi/2018-01-25-vucic-vucic-je-dakare-moje-pakosti

4. In the article “The Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue meeting in Brussels”, January 16, 2018 was canceled after the murder of Oliver Ivanovic in Mitrovica on that day. For more information see the article “Ivanovic’s murder, canceled Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue meeting in Brussels”, January 16, 2018 at http://kallxo.com/vrasja-e-ivanoviqit-anulohet-takimi-dialogut-kosove-serbi-ne-bruksel/
The Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue launched after the UN Resolution was adopted on 9 September 2010, bringing the parties back to the discussion table for, as it was dubbed, normalizing relations between the two countries.

This dialogue marked the first negotiating process between the parties where the US was not a direct part present at the discussion table. This was also considered as a strategy of shifting responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the region from the US to the EU, symbolically marked by the visit of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Baroness Catherine Ashton in Kosovo on 31 October 2012.

During this visit, US Secretary of State Clinton had stated that the United States was working closely with the European Union and High Representative Ashton to advance the political dialogue that had begun, urging the parties to implement the agreements and continue the co-operation to normalize relations.7

On the other hand, the EU’s high representative stated that '[...] this dialogue aimed to improve the lives of the citizens, and the EU was in close contact with friends and partners in the United States of America who had played a vital role in supporting not just Kosovo but also the EU as a whole.8

After 6 years of EU being the mediator of the dialogue between the parties and US being a strong supporter of this process, the Kosovo leadership voiced the necessity of US direct involvement in the discussion table. This request was made due to the dissatisfaction throughout this process and therefore the concluding phase of the dialogue, where a binding agreement is expected.

It was the President of Kosovo, Mr Hashim Thaçi, who upon the meeting on 29 September with the US Vice President, Mike Pence, stated that the US direct involvement in this final phase of the dialogue was decisive for reaching a final agreement applicable to both sides, adding that this was the only way to strengthen long-term peace in the region.9 and 13

Whilst, at the second meeting of the Stabilization and Association Council between Kosovo and the EU held on 17 November 2017 in Brussels, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr Ramush Haradinaj stated that ‘Kosovo is committed in concluding all open issues with Serbia, by guaranteeing dialogue between the EU and US.’11 and 12

To the Kosovo’s request for US direct involvement in the dialogue, President Vučić responded by stating that if there is US involvement in the process, there will therefore be involvement of Russia as well. Furthermore, he added that if Kosovo wants in the dialogue someone who has recognized Kosovo, Serbia will ask for someone who has not done so, and that’s Russia.10

On the other hand, the EU has stated that any change in the dialogue format needs to be agreed between the two sides, even when it comes to the involvement of other stakeholders within its framework.14

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7. See the full statement of the S. Secretary Hillary Clinton, 31 October 2012 at, https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/10/199899.htm
8. See the full statement of the EU High Representative, 31 October 2012 at: https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-824_en.htm
9. See the EU statement of President Thaçi, 29 September 2017 at, http://www.president-kosovo.net/uz/emam/prezidenti-american/michael-pence-visit-president-naci.html
10. President Thaçi made this statement in different events as well, including the discussion organized by KO21 on 15 September 2017, where he stated that he requested the US direct involvement in the final phase of this process and that the benefits of this long-lasting peace in the Balkans is to affect the whole continent. See the discussion with President Thaçi organized by KO21 at: http://www.ko21.org.uk/public/diplomatic-contact/106
11. See the Full Statement of Prime Minister Haradinaj, 31 January 2018 at: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/?page=1,9,7299
12. At the Assembly session of 7 December 2017, Prime Minister Haradinaj once again mentioned this issue, stating that the US involvement is necessary considering that the EU has a neutral status towards Kosovo, and Serbia does not recognize Kosovo. See the declaration of Prime Minister Haradinaj in the transcript of the Kosovo Assembly session, 7 December 2017, p.11, at http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/trans_s_2017_12_07_10_7114.pdf
Do you think that Kosovo–Serbia dialogue should continue without US involvement in the process?

On the other hand, 30% of the citizens said they support the continuation of the dialogue with Serbia even without the direct involvement of the US, while 21% of them said they do not know whether or not the dialogue should continue if the US is not directly involved in this process.

The survey results show that about half of the citizens surveyed (49%) think that Kosovo–Serbia dialogue should not continue unless there is direct involvement of the US in this process.

Regarding the results by ethnicity, 51% of Albanian respondents and 48% of respondents from other communities believe that Kosovo–Serbia dialogue should not proceed without the direct involvement of the US, compared to 17% of Serbian citizens sharing the same opinion. On the other hand, 45% of respondents from this community believe that dialogue should continue without US involvement in this process, compared to only 29% of Albanian citizens and 24% from other communities sharing the same opinion. Meanwhile, 20% of Albanian respondents, 38% of Serbian respondents and 27% of respondents from other communities said they do not know whether or not the dialogue should continue without the direct involvement of the US in this process.
During the past year, there were many discussions about the new and concluding phase of dialogue, whereby a fast conclusion of this process was requested through a binding agreement between the parties. Despite the fact that the Kosovo side has not yet come up with a state strategy on the future of this process and a large number of agreements that are still not implemented, 2018 was often considered as the deadline for this process to come to an end.

KDI has asked citizens if they believe the process of dialogue with Serbia will be concluded by 2018 and received the following responses:

- About 51% of respondents do not expect that the process of dialogue with Serbia will be concluded by 2018, with only 22% of them believing that this process will be concluded by 2018. On the other hand, 27% of the respondents said they do not know whether or not the dialogue will be concluded during this year.

Regarding the opinion of citizens by ethnicity, the responses to the concerned question have been almost the same from respondents of all communities. Thus, about half of the citizens of all communities, respectively, 51% of the Albanian respondents, 46% of Serbian respondents and 45% of the respondents from other communities do not expect that the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue will be concluded in 2018. On the other hand, only 23% of Albanian respondents, 19% of Serbian respondents and 14% of respondents from other communities believe that the dialogue will be concluded during this period. Meanwhile, 26% of Albanian respondents, 35% of Serbian respondents and 41% of respondents from other communities responded that they do not know if the process of dialogue will be concluded or not during 2018.
Despite the parties’ expressed willingness to dialogue and reach a final agreement, their expectations about the epilogue of this process vary drastically. Last year, President Vučić stated in an article that the time has come to deal with the Kosovo issue and stated, among other things, that the dialogue should continue, otherwise we will conserve the conflict. 17 However, on 25 January 2018, he stated that “if somebody thinks that the idea of the process of normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina means merely Serbia having to recognize Kosovo, and that’s it, then thanks, goodbye” 18 Vučić has also initiated an internal dialogue in Serbia for resolving, as he said, the Kosovo issue by including the Serbian Government, civil society, political parties, the Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Church.

On the other hand, the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, in an article dated 17 August 2017, stated among other things that “we believe that the breakthrough would be the signing of an Agreement on Normalization and Reconciliation between our two countries and the historic agreement between Kosovo and Serbia should include mutual recognition as the only way to end all disputes once and for all.” 19 Similar stand was shared by the Prime Minister of Kosovo who, during an Assembly session, stated that “there is no reason and logic to continue a dialogue that does not result in mutual recognition with Serbia.” 20

17 See the statement of the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić in Koha.net “Vuçiq: Nëse dialogu zhvillohet vetëm për ta njohur Kosovën, atëherë mirupafshim” (Vučić: If dialogue means merely Serbia having to recognize Kosovo, then goodbye), 24 July 2017, at: http://www.koha.net/arberi/71523/vuciq-per-kosoven-te-jemi-reale-mos-te-fshehim-koken-si-struci/
18 See the statement of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić in Koha.net “Vuçiq: Nësja dialoghut e tjera, për ta njohur Kosovën, atëherë mirupafshim” (Vučić: Other dialogue means merely Serbia having to recognize Kosovo, then goodbye), 25 July 2017, at: http://www.koha.net/arberi/71923/vuciq-nese-dialoghut-e-tjera-për-ta-njohur-kosovën-atëherë-mirupafshim/
19 See the article written by President Thaçi “Treni i fundit për një paqe të qëndrueshme” (The last train for a sustainable peace), 17 August 2017, at: http://www.president-ks-trans_s_2017_12_14_10_7135_al.pdf
20 See Prime Minister Haradinaj’s statement at the Assembly session of 17 December 2017, p. 61, at: http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/keks/proc/trans_c_12_17_46_181717.pdf

Even the President of the Assembly, Kadri Veseli, stated that mutual recognition with Serbia is inevitable. 21 It can be concluded that the entire political spectrum share a common position on Serbia recognizing Kosovo. Statements of various international officials who have had different opinions on whether or not Serbia will recognize Kosovo at the end of this process have also contributed to the uncertainty about the epilogue of this process, while the office of the EU’s high representative or the EU itself has not articulated a clear position with the exception of the call for the so-called ‘comprehensive normalization’ which is also foreseen in chapter 35 of Serbia’s negotiations with the EU. 22 When asked in an interview whether there would be a bright future for Kosovo and Serbia without recognizing each other, the representative of the EU office in Kosovo said that the EU has a basic principle, that of good neighbourly relations. 23

Regarding this issue, KDI asked for the view of the public opinion where it turns out that about half of the citizens surveyed (48%) said that they do not expect recognition from Serbia at the end of this process, compared to 31% of citizens who expect that at the end of the dialogue, Serbia will recognize Kosovo. Meanwhile, 21% of citizens do not know whether or not this will happen.

The survey results by ethnicity have highlighted a high percentage of surveyed citizens of the Serb community (68%) who said they do not expect Serbia to recognize Kosovo after the dialogue is concluded, compared to 47% of Albanian citizens and 38% of citizens from other communities who also do not expect this to happen. On the other hand, only 1% of Serb respondents expect Serbia will recognize Kosovo at the end of this process, compared to 33% of Albanians and 23% from other communities who expect such a thing to happen. Meanwhile, 29% of Albanian citizens, 31% of Serbian citizens and 39% of citizens from other communities have said they do not know whether or not Serbia will recognize Kosovo after the dialogue is resumed.

23 See the interview of the EU Representative in Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, 22 September 2017, at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/32628/interview-eu-attendi-ue/vo-alm-newspaper_en
Do you think that the new agreements with Serbia should be discussed in the Assembly before being signed in Brussels?

Based on the numerous statements of Kosovo Assembly deputies and the public opinion analyses organized by KDI, there has been a low level of transparency about the dialogue process. The involvement of the Assembly in this process has been considered as extremely important based on the individual statements of MPs requesting that the agreements be discussed in the Assembly and on the meetings between the parliamentary committees, where it was proposed the need for a Resolution for a more active role of the Assembly in this process.

KDI has asked citizens whether they believe that the new agreements with Serbia should be discussed in the Assembly before being signed in Brussels.

I DO NOT KNOW

Yes

No

67%

14%

19%

71%

20%

56%

13%

31%

15%

16%

49%

29%

In your opinion, did Brussels’s dialogue succeed to improve relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

- **YES**: 27%
- **NO**: 50%
- **I DON'T KNOW**: 23%

Moreover, most of the agreements reached since the beginning of the dialogue process in 2011 remain unimplemented, while Serbia continues the lobbying and propaganda campaign against Kosovo in the international arena. All these developments that have conveyed conflicting messages to the general public about the effects of dialogue between the parties and the real impact on improving the lives of citizens. To highlight citizens’ opinion about this, KDI has asked them whether they think that the Brussels dialogue has succeeded to improve Kosovo–Serbia relations, on which question it has received the following responses.

Half of the respondents (50%) do not think that the Brussels dialogue has succeeded to improve relations between Kosovo and Serbia, as opposed to only 27% of those who think that relations between the two states have improved as a result of the dialogue. On the other hand, 21% of citizens said they did not know whether Brussels’s dialogue has succeeded to improve relations between the two states.

As far as opinions based on ethnicity are concerned, half of the Albanian respondents (51%) think that the Brussels dialogue has failed to improve the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. A large number of citizens from other communities (46%) share the same opinion with the latter, including 31% of respondents from the Serbian community who think the same thing. On the other hand, 27% of Albanian and other communities’ respondents and 22% of Serb respondents think that Brussels’s dialogue has in fact improved relations between the two states. Meanwhile, 21% of Albanian respondents, 47% of Serb respondents and 26% of respondents from other communities do not know whether or not the dialogue has improved relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

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27% To reduce no base to pernatives elicite.

50% To reduce no base to pernatives elicite.

23% To reduce no base to pernatives elicite.

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CONCLUSION

The results of this public opinion poll disclose the following findings:

01 About 49% of citizens think that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should not continue without the direct involvement of the US in this process. There are 45% of respondents from the Serb community who share the view that dialogue should continue without US involvement in this process, as opposed to only 29% of citizens from the Albanian community and 24% from other communities who think the same thing.

02 Over half of the 51% of the respondents do not expect the process of dialogue with Serbia to be concluded in 2018. All citizens share similar attitude regardless of their ethnicity.

03 About half of the respondents (48%) responded that they did not expect recognition from Serbia at the end of the dialogue process. Only 1% of Serbian community citizens expect that Serbia will recognize the state of Kosovo at the end of this process, compared to 34% of Albanian citizens and 23% of citizens of other communities.

04 A very high percentage of citizens, respectively 67% of them, think that new agreements with Serbia should be discussed in the Assembly before signing them in Brussels. While 71% of the Albanian community and 56% of other communities share this opinion, only 20% of the Serb community considers that the Assembly should play this role.

05 There are 50% of citizens who think that the Brussels dialogue has failed to improve Kosovo-Serbia relations. This attitude is shared by the majority of citizens from the Albanian community and other communities, and Serb community, respectively 47% of them do not know what consequences the dialogue has had in relations between the two states.
NORMALIZIMI I MARRËDHËNIEVE KOSOVË-SERBI

KËNDVËSHTRIMI I QYTETARËVE

SHKURT 2018