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EU moving away from US on Kosovo, says Belgrade

By Lucia Kubosova, EU Observer

<http://euobserver.com/9/24970>

The Serbian minister on Kosovo affairs claims the EU has slightly changed its stance on the Kosovo issue away from insisting on the province's independence to a better understanding of Belgrade's position.

Speaking at an event by a Brussels think-tank just a day after the second round of talks between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians on Monday (15 October), Mr Samardzic said that although it was not "marvellous" there has been some positive outcome to the current diplomatic initiative, led by a trio of EU, US and Russian envoys.

"We have seen progress from nothing to something," he said.

He pointed out that while the previous UN-led talks focused on issues other than the future status of the province, the troika negotiations have gone to the core problem.

The current diplomatic round was launched after Russia, a permanent member of the UN's security council, earlier this year blocked UN envoy Marti Ahtisaari's plan to set the 90-percent ethnic Albanian province of 2 million inhabitants on the road to independence.

The trio of envoys are due to report back to the UN about the results of the negotiations on 10 December, with Serb and Kosovo Albanian officials set to meet again on 22 October and up to four more meetings scheduled throughout November.

Less US-oriented?

Mr Samardzic maintained that until six months ago, "the EU followed exclusively the US approach on Kosovo" while now it is trying more to consider its own interests in the region and is "more in favour of continuation of talks to reach a compromise than before."



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He suggested that this EU policy is "still being just formulated" and urged Europe to find a "specific European solution" more quickly.

But it is also Belgrade which is resisting time pressure and is against the December deadline for finding a solution.

Wolfgang Ischinger, EU's envoy in the troika on Kosovo, said on late Sunday (14 October), that international negotiators found some "encouraging elements," concerning the approach of Belgrade and Pristina but certainly "not enough."

"We must get them to recognize the fact that they are still too far and there is still quite a distance to be covered if really we want to get to an agreement. This distance will also require some painful decisions by one or by both sides".

Early death of EU foreign policy?

For Serbia, a "European-kind of solution" for Kosovo would be "a kind of autonomy," says Mr Samardzic, as he thinks it is "a classical European solution on how to solve minority problems."

He explained that within such an autonomy there would be "a big room for experiments possible" on the details of power-sharing.

Limited autonomy is unacceptable for Kosovo Albanians however who have announced they are planning to declare independence unilaterally shortly after the troika talks are due to end in December.

While the US has signalled it would recognize such a unilateral move, Belgrade is hopeful that the EU would not follow suit due to disagreements over the issue among its member states.

"A unilateral move by some states recognising Kosovo without a common EU



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position would be disastrous for its foreign and security policy, it would be the end of it," commented Mr Samardzic.

For their part, EU officials try to use eventual European membership as political leverage for both sides to find a solution.