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Belgrade: If agreement was possible on Hong Kong, why not on Kosovo?

KosovoCompromise Staff

Top Belgrade officials at the Vienna talks on Monday used the analogy of the compromise solution on Hong Kong autonomy in China to suggest that a solution based on substantial autonomy and respect of international law was possible and effective.

Responding to the call to present some fresh ideas and suggestions, Belgrade used Hong Kong to reject claims that its proposal for substantial autonomy was “abstract”.

After 156 years of British rule, Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997 with the promise that the city would enjoy a wide-degree of autonomy from the mainland. The territory was allowed to keep its capitalist economy, U.K.-style legal system and civil liberties.

Commenting on the Kosovo Albanian stand that Serbia had not been present in Kosovo for eight years as an argument for Pristina’s independence, Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica said that China had not been present in Hong Kong for decades, but that a functional solution had been found nevertheless.

"Hong Kong is an example. The important thing about this model is its meaning and this is that if people want an agreement, it can work," Kostunica said.

Kostunica argued that Serbia “is offering Kosovo Albanians more than any ethnic minority in any country has ever been offered.” According to him, the seizing of a portion of Serbia’s territory would not be the kind of solution that would bring stability to the region.

Serbian President Boris Tadic pointed out that the negotiations should focus on the basic principle – how to accelerate progress on the road to Europe.

“Public threats, artificial deadlines and manipulation by means of fear will not contribute to resolving the issue we are negotiating,” the Serbian president said, welcoming the “calmer tones” on Kosovo that have appeared over the past few weeks within the international community.

The president and prime minister said that Belgrade was ready to continue talks on the 14 working points suggested by the Contact Group’s troika at Vienna on October 22, adding that the paper must include mentions to the U.N. Security Council Resolution



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1244, which guarantees Belgrade's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as an exclusion of all unilateral acts.

Kostunica highlighted the shortcomings of the 14 points, saying they suggested relations between two states, which he said was completely unacceptable.

"I think that at today's meeting we took the issue of confederation and regulating relations in such a manner off the agenda once and for all," the Serbian prime minister said.

The Serbian officials stressed they were against the cessation of talks if no compromise was reached by December 10, when the troika is to submit a report to the U.N. secretary general.

Pristina representatives once again dismissed any kind of compromise and insisted on independence. Pristina negotiating team spokesman Skender Hiseni said that no progress had been made due to Belgrade's stand that the process was about preserving Serbia's sovereignty.