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September 21, 2007

Belgrade: We need EU help for our Kosovo plan

KosovoCompromise Staff

Serbia would need European Union help to implement a plan for the self-government of Kosovo if the Albanian majority of the province accepts it, but it would be a wise investment, Serbian Kosovo Minister Slobodan Samardzic said.

"We try to be realistic as much as possible. They are (Albanians) looking for independence. They cannot get it as far as Serbia is concerned. So we must find a middle ground.", Samardzic told Reuters.

Top Serbian negotiator said Serbia proposed "the highest level of autonomy on offer anywhere in Europe, maybe even in the world.". It said it was not seeking "absolute victory" over Kosovo Albanians, who form 90 percent of Kosovo's population.

Serbia offers Kosovo "loose integration" for 10-20 years, under the label "substantial autonomy", with Serbs and Albanians living "parallel lives". The Albanians would not participate in Serbia's government unless they wanted to, Samardzic stressed.

Kosovo would be a "self-governing territory" in terms of its political and economic life. Serbia would manage foreign policy and border control and would reserve its rights on military issues, but not necessarily exercise them.

Samardzic said the Albanians would likely remain a "hostile population" for some time, so the question of who would actually man border posts would have to be answered pragmatically. He told Reuters it was primarily up to the international community to guarantee the settlement, "in the form of a civilian and military mission for some period, to keep the peace". "The EU is ready to pay," Samardzic said. "...maybe it's cheaper than 30 years of clashes."

"Independence is just a magic word," Samardzic said. "They get empty symbolism, and they will be a black hole in Europe."

In an interview with The Times Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic said that Serbia "is suffering a cooling of public support for the idea of Europe" due to Kosovo status issue. "I am afraid that if things go wrong, if it is not handled well regarding the future status of Kosovo, then there will be a dominant majority within Serbia that will say, 'This is not fair, it is humiliating, they [the EU] don't want us. To hell with it,'" Jeremic said.



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Minister cautioned that if Serbia is not given more hope by the EU, and an acceptable deal on Kosovo, then it will turn its back on Europe. Jeremic took part in talks yesterday with the “troika” of the US, the EU and Russia, before meetings with Kosovo representatives next week in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly.

He said that it was unhelpful to speculate how Serbia might react if Kosovo unilaterally declared independence but dismissed the suggestion that it might take military action. “We will not use force, we will not contribute to the instability” of the Balkans, he said. But he added: “It is only if Belgrade and Pristina agree that we will have peace.”

He argued that Scotland could afford to toy with separation from the UK and that Belgium could split into two because they were at peace, but that in the Balkans, “where we are still struggling to stabilise”, indulging the nationalistic instincts of minorities was too dangerous.

If Serbia were within the EU, he added, then “borders have a different meaning and can be discussed”, although he refused to clarify what this might mean for Kosovo. He concluded: “I really hope that early in the next decade Serbia will be part of the EU.”