



KOSOVO

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Fifth round : Belgrade proposing, Pristina buying time

KosovoCompromise Staff

The Pristina delegation kept on buying time until December 10 and the Troika did not elaborate a common document, leaving Belgrade as the only side proposing ways forward at the fifth, Brussels round of direct talks on the future status of Kosovo.

Yet another, three-day meeting is scheduled for November 26-28 at Baden, near Vienna, in what could be the last and decisive encounter before the Troika report to the UN Secretary-General.

Provided there is no u-turn in the talks in which Brussels and Washington would finally convince Pristina to truly negotiate, it is hard to imagine that the last meeting can have any chance for success.

The mediating Troika did not propose any documents to the sides.

Upon his arrival at the talks, the EU mediator Wolfgang Ischinger had said that he would consult with the rest of the Troika on his status-neutral proposal for Kosovo.

At the meeting, however, it is the American representative Frank Wisner who spoke about such proposal, asking the Belgrade delegation whether something along these lines would be acceptable.

Belgrade rejected such an outcome.

“My answer was ‘no’. We have to talk about status because this is what the talks are about (...) we can talk about partnership afterwards, but only after resolving the status issue, along the lines of international law”, Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica said, adding that the Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku had a similar stance to Wisner’s.

Kostunica said that the status-neutral solution is a “trick” and “another word to hide the fact that – under this proposal – Kosovo and Serbia should be two separate states”.

The Belgrade negotiations team presented yet another successful example of functioning of “substantial autonomy” – the Aland islands, inhabited by Swedes, but within the territory of Finland.

“We have shown that our intention was not to copy Hong Kong or the Aland islands, but to find the best elements which could serve as a basis for a flexible model of resolution of the Kosovo status”, Serbian President Boris Tadic said.



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“This is a principled position (...) once again, we made a step forward”, Tadic said.

“Serbia will not give up on its sovereignty on Kosovo and Metohia and will not accept its own disintegration”, he said.

Serbian Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic presented a comparative analysis of the Hong Kong model in China, the Aland islands in Finland and Kosovo in Serbia.

“Last time in Vienna, we heard remarks that Hong Kong was in Asia and that it is the Chinese people who live in Hong Kong (...) this time we did not have such remarks since the Aland islands are in Europe and they are inhabited by Swedes, not Fins”, Samardzic said, adding that “a very broad autonomy in the islands has been functioning successfully for more than 80 years”.

“We have shown once again that, if there is a good political will, a solution can be found”, Samardzic said.

“We took two functional examples of the largest possible autonomy and asymmetrical solutions within a state, and we have shown that our example of substantial autonomy was very similar, and that it gives the Albanian citizens even greater advantages”, the Serbian minister said.

The Troika, he said, reacted “positively and with interest”.

The Aland islands had been a part of the Swedish Kingdom until 1809 when tzarist Russia took it over – along with Finland – and kept it under its administration until its fall in 1917.

The Aland islands then asked to join Sweden, but Finland rejected a secession and offered substantial autonomy, which the Aland rejected.

A compromise was found several years later, in 1921, when the League of Nations offered Finland sovereignty over the Aland islands, with maximum local autonomy and local parliament.

Today, the citizens of the Aland manage their own political, legislative, economic and financial affairs.

Their specific situation allowed them to become one of the most prosperous regions in Europe, with a strong banking and transport industry in Scandinavia and the Baltics.

Kostunica said that at the Baden talks, Serbia will further explain its proposal for substantial autonomy.

“I am convinced that this is a sustainable, good and legal solution”, he said.



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The delegation of Serbia, however, regretted the fact that the Kosovo Albanian side was not motivated to negotiate because it was convinced it would become independent even without negotiating.

“The Albanian side once again did not express a will to negotiate, but only discussed about a post-status relationship”, Tadic said.

“It is cheaper for them to wait for independence, than to talk to us”, Samardzic said, adding that Belgrade was expecting Troika’s help in urging Pristina to negotiate.

The Kosovo Albanian delegation refused Belgrade’s proposals once again, calling them “inapplicable in Kosovo”, since, as they said, “Kosovo is a unique case”.

President Fatmir Sejdiu and likely future Prime Minister Hashim Thaci said “independence has no alternative”, but promised to coordinate their moves with Brussels and Washington.

“We will respect the agenda of the international community, and after December 10, with full coordination with Washington and Brussels, Kosovo will make a decision on independence”, Thaci said.

A majority of EU foreign affairs ministers had warned him the day earlier at the GAERC not to pursue unilateral moves in terms of the Kosovo status.