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Time for real European leadership on Kosovo

By Ian Bancroft for www.kosovocompromise.com

At the European Council meeting on the 14th December, EU leaders must reaffirm that Kosovo is a European issue and that solutions lie in constructive dialogue based upon Europe's own principles and practices.

The time has come for Europe to provide real leadership over Kosovo. For it is the European perspective that can encourage a softening of the respective stances of each side, in accordance with the principles outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1244 which reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and calls for substantial autonomy and meaningful self-administration for Kosovo. This is the basis for a lasting solution to Kosovo's status and for peace and stability throughout the region. By using its leverage and influence to create space and pressure for concession, the EU can and should achieve a negotiated resolution to this issue.

Consolidating Europe's achievements in the Western Balkans requires that Europe displays the same ingenuity that has facilitated its own evolution. Europe's integrative innovations have redefined and challenged prevailing understandings of sovereignty and autonomy, enabling the accommodation and integration of differences, of "Unity in Diversity". Reaffirming Europe's commitment to complex, multiple layers of shared and limited sovereignty is central to mitigating those internal divisions and tensions that continue to afflict Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. With respect to Kosovo, therefore, discussions over independence must be replaced by discussions over broad autonomy and special relations with the EU.

Alternatives do exist but Europe's willingness to explore them seems to be lacking. Failure to act now will mean that Europe must contend with the dynamic of instability



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that will accompany a unilateral declaration of independence. A new wave of refugees and the re-opening of border issues in the Western Balkans will generate further instability in Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, threatening and undermining the significant progress made in each. Supporting Kosovo's independence from Serbia whilst concurrently insisting that both have a common European future seems somewhat contradictory and inconsistent.

Decisions taken over Kosovo will define the core of Europe's fledgling common foreign policy and its ability to contend with challenges beyond both the Western Balkans and its own borders, especially those of Georgia and Moldova. As such, Europe must look inwards and project outwards the core of its political identity. Only then will Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy become reality not aspiration, active not rhetorical, explicit not symbolic.

Ian Bancroft is a British political analyst specialized in Balkan affairs.