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First direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina

KosovoCompromise Staff

Belgrade and Pristina are meeting in New York on Friday, at the first direct talks on the status of Kosovo under the new negotiating process spearheaded by the Contact Group troika.

Serbia's president and prime minister, Boris Tadic and Vojislav Kostunica, are heading the delegation from Belgrade, while Kosovo president Fatmir Sejdiu and premier Agim Ceku are at the helm of the team from Pristina.

The meeting, held at the European Union office in New York, is managed by international mediators -- Russian representative Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko, U.S. diplomat Frank Wisner, and German diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger, who represents the EU.

Belgrade is insisting that the two delegations should examine status-related issues, while Pristina's representatives have stated that they consider the independence of Kosovo a "fait accompli" and that it cannot be discussed.

Belgrade has proposed to the troika five topics for direct talks.

Firstly, achieving international agreement on the future status of Kosovo, based on fundamental autonomy for the province within Serbia.

Belgrade has also proposed a discussion on dividing up jurisdictions between Serbia and Kosovo, economic issues, relations of the province to international financial organizations and regional initiatives. The final topic is the presence of the international community in Kosovo under U.N. auspices, which would ensure the implementation of the status solution.

The Pristina officials have arrived in New York with the proposal of an agreement on good neighborly relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which defines the province as an independent state.

A plan for talks between the two delegations in October and November should be drafted during the meeting. The troika has announced that negotiations would intensify during that period. The international mediators are due to submit a report to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon by Dec. 10.