



# KOSOVO

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October 1, 2007

## **Belgrade: Only direct talks can lead to success**

KosovoCompromise Staff

Serbian President Boris Tadic and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica said over the weekend that the direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina were the only way to find a solution for the status of Kosovo, and for the Belgrade side to convince the Albanians to change their initial stand.

“Once again we presented the proposal for substantial autonomy, without questioning Serbia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, and we raised issues with the Albanian side which wanted to discuss relations between two sovereign states,” Tadic said upon his return from the first round of direct talks in New York on September 28.

Tadic went on to say that the talks with the international mediating troika had tackled the communication strategy and manner in which the entire negotiating process could be improved.

Kostunica said that Serbia had from day one of the talks insisted on devoting great attention to direct negotiations which were “extremely necessary for the success of the negotiating process because that was the only way to demonstrate the strength of the Serbian side’s arguments”.

Kostunica pointed out that Serbia expected the troika and the Contact Group to present a clear stand that the countries involved in the process would make no statements that would stimulate and encourage unilateral acts, particularly ones concerning the proclamation of Kosovo’s independence.

Tadic and Kostunica both said it was good that the U.S. representative in the troika, Frank Wisner, had said that his mandate in the negotiating process was to remain devoted to a compromise, not to any imposed solution or spurring of Kosovo’s independence. But both also voiced regret that Wisner said this during an informal conversation, not during the meeting between Belgrade and Pristina.

Kostunica said that the success of the talks, i.e. “what will happen in Brussels” on October 14 was not up to the Serbian and Albanian delegations, but to the third side – those who were to encourage the Albanians to aim for a compromise and not be “stuck” on the idea of independence.

Kosovo Serb leaders Oliver Ivanovic and Milan Ivanovic said that encouraging steps forward had been made at the New York talks, despite a lack of serious movement of the two sides’ positions.



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Milan Ivanovic, leader of the Serb National Council of Northern Kosovo, said that the fact the talks had intensified was also progress, as well as the fact that the New York Declaration excluded violence. He stressed that important thing was that all participants in the Contact Group meeting had agreed that Washington had abandoned unilateral steps regarding the recognition of Kosovo's independence.

Head of the Serb Ticket for Kosovo and Metohija Oliver Ivanovic said it was good that the Albanian side had been told it could not count on a unilateral solution.

According to him, it is also important that Belgrade was given a chance to present its concept on the full integration of Albanians in Serbia's political and legal system, thus giving the Albanian side an opportunity to say why they find that unacceptable.

By refusing that concept, the Albanians are putting themselves in a subordinated position, because the international community wants to see arguments – which they do not have, Oliver Ivanovic said, adding that this fact will finally show the Albanian side in true light and prove that romantic wishes for independence are not enough.

Analyst Dusan Janjic said that the mediating troika and the Contact Group were the main winners of the New York talks, especially because the Belgrade and Pristina delegations had accepted the New York Declaration.

“The New York Declaration is an unexpectedly high result for the troika and both sides' unexpected acceptance and readiness for compromise,” the director of the Belgrade Ethnic Relations Forum said.