September 29, 2007

Direct talks: New York round ends, next one in Brussels on October 14

KosovoCompromise Staff

The first round of direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina on Friday in New York resulted in the signing of the "New York declaration" on behavior during the status talks as well as in an agreement to hold the next round in Brussels on October 14.

The EU/US/Russia troika facilitated the two-hour meeting at the EU mission in New York between the Belgrade delegation led by President Boris Tadic and Prime minister Vojislav Kostunica on one side and the Kosovo delegation led by President Fatmir Sejdiu and Prime minister Agim Ceku on the other.

A statement by the troika following the meeting said "the atmosphere of the meetings was cooperative".

It said that "Belgrade presented its vision of substantial autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia's borders", while Pristina presented "its vision of friendship and cooperation between two independent states and full implementation of the minority rights protections recommended by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari."

"The Troika encouraged the parties to present their proposals in a way that would appeal to the other side", the statement said.

Belgrade and Pristina signed the "New York declaration" in which they reiterated their commitment to engage seriously in the talks.

"Both parties reaffirmed their commitment, as expressed in the Vienna document of 30 August, to refrain from any activities or statements that might jeopardize the security situation", the declaration said.

"Both parties understand that the Contact Group will report to the UN Secretary General by 10 December, 2007. In this regard, they welcomed the Troika's intention to intensify its work programme with a view to reaching agreement before the Troika's mandate concludes", says the document, agreed and signed by representatives of Belgrade and Pristina.

The troika also held separate meetings with the two sides.

Tadic said after the meetings that Belgrade appealed on Pristina to take "very seriously" in account its proposal on "substantial autonomy" because it does not

imply a return to a previous status but an appeal for a solution acceptable to both sides.

Kostunica said the talks showed the superiority of the Serbian argumentation.

"Our position is that all sides should come up with a proposal of a democratic solution: such a solution excludes unilateral acts, violence and violations of international documents such as the UN Charter and the UN Security Council resolution 1244", Kostunica said, adding that the "real talks are only about to start".

Kosovo's Prime minister Agim Ceku warned, however, that if no solution was found by December 10, Pristina would take the matter in its own hands and take the path of unilateral independence.

"We have clearly said that we would wait until December 10 and that we would call for an action of the international community after that (…) if there's no such action, we would not take long before taking responsibility and adequate measures", Ceku said after the meeting.

The troika expressed satisfaction that the meeting was held but warned that it was up to the two sides to present proposals which would appeal to the other side.

"We have entered these talks seriously, we have spent time to talk with both sides about the details and both sides have shown at the meeting that they want this process to continue (…) it's a good signal", EU's representative in the troika, Wolfgang Ischinger said.

The US representative Frank Visner said he believed it was possible to come up with some progress and real talks on status before December 10.

Russia's representative Aleksandr Bocan-Harchenko said the key principle agreed in New York was to try to find a "compromise solution which would be backed by the UN Security Council".