



KOSOVO

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Troika meets with Belgrade at opening of two-day London talks

Kosovo Compromise Staff

The Contact Group's mediating troika will meet with the Belgrade delegation on Tuesday evening at the opening of the two-day talks in London, which aim is to prepare the agenda and proceedings for the first direct talks scheduled for September 28 in New York.

The Pristina delegation will meet with the EU-Russia-US troika on Wednesday morning.

The Belgrade delegation is led by Minister of Kosovo and Metohia Slobodan Samardzic and Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, while the Pristina team is headed by Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu and Prime Minister Agim Ceku.

The meetings are expected to sum up the results of the Vienna talks held on August 30 and to resolve open procedural questions related to the holding of direct talks. The precise agenda of the direct talks will be one of the core issues.

Minister Samardzic said that the Belgrade delegation will present a draft agenda for the Sept. 28 direct negotiations. However, he added that no concrete results should be expect at the New York meeting either except a principled resolve to negotiate, because the real negotiations will start in October.

"We expect the troika to hear us out and adopt our proposals" for the agenda, Samardzic said. "We will demand that the Albanian side also unveil its proposals for the talks, not just talk about an abstract program of the status of the province. We expect to get a little closer to the beginning of the process, and we expect the process to run in a normal and expected manner," the minister said.

On the other hand, Kosovo's Albanian leaders said Kosovo was ready to offer Serbia a treaty guaranteeing cordial relations after the breakaway province becomes independent. The treaty will be presented on Wednesday in London to the international troika.

"This will relax our relations and develop good, friendly ties between two sovereign countries," Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu said. Kosovo's PM Agim Ceku said Pristina would not negotiate the province's independence. "We want to talk about issues after independence," Ceku said. "Independence is done."



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The Pristina delegation has agreed to direct talks, but refuses to negotiate the status of Kosovo, arguing it had been resolved by the proposal of former U.N. envoy Martti Ahtisaari on "supervised independence".

The government of Serbia, on the other hand, insists on direct status talks, recalling that the Ahtisaari plan was rejected in the U.N. Security Council in July.

The first round of direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina on the future status of Kosovo is to take place at EU representation office to the U.N. in New York, on Sept. 28.

The day before that, also in New York, the Contact Group members' foreign ministers will hold a meeting, with the participation of the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana.

policy leader and persuade Belgrade and Priština to achieve a viable status solution very soon.

Persistent disunity in the EU could leave the door open to regional destabilisation.

Talk of partition has resurfaced. This idea of slicing off northern Kosovo above the Ibar River has recently crept back onto the discussion table among some diplomatic circles.

Although partition is completely opposed, "it can't be ruled out", Dana Allin from the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies told New Europe.

Partition is an unlikely scenario as Serbs also live below the river line, but there could be an exodus of Serbs if the situation worsens. It could awaken irredentist ideas in ethnic Albanians living in southern Serbia and in parts of FYROM, and in Serbs living in Bosnia-Herzegovina's Republika Srpska.

The International Crisis Group firmly warned in a report late last month: "There is more than a little potential for 'Greater Serbia' and 'Greater Albania' ideologies to feed each other if nourished by the partition of Kosovo."

Kosovo is one of the poorest areas in Europe and is a haven for crime and corruption. A forsaken independent state such as this cannot economically or politically sustain itself in today's world – especially in the centre of the Balkans - or Europe for that matter. Support from its far-reaching neighbour across the Atlantic is not nearly enough.

"This entity (Kosovo) needs external support," Dunay said. The EU has already taken on this project, funding well over one billion Euro over the last eight years, and needs to follow through to resolution.

The road to regional security and development in the Balkans starts with Kosovo. Serb, Kosovo Albanian and European politicians have only a short time to start trusting one another.