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EU disputes and UN hesitation bring confusion to international monitoring of Kosovo

By Helsingin Sanomat

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The transfer of the newly-independent Kosovo to the supervision of the European Union could face delays of up to several months.

Responsibility for the international monitoring operation is scheduled to shift from the United Nations to the European Union, but as the date approaches, there is considerable confusion over the matter in both the UN and the EU.

“There are fewer countries that have recognised Kosovo than had been anticipated, and Russia has succeeded in wielding more influence in the UN than had been expected”, said one diplomatic source.

Confusion over the administration of Kosovo is especially troubling for the EU, for whom the effort is supposed to be a show of how the Union's common security and defence policy will work. In addition, it is the largest civilian crisis management in the EU's history. It is also Finland's largest civilian crisis management effort.

In Finland, several dozen people, and in the rest of Europe several hundred more are planning to take part in the operation. Now they are waiting for the beginning of their deployment with growing uncertainty.

Things are hardly easier for the international personnel in Kosovo. For instance, a Finnish police officer working for the UN operation does not necessarily know whom he will be working for after mid-June, or if he might get to go home.

“Finland feels that we should continue to adhere to the mid-June start, but that looks difficult”, says Mikko Kinnunen, head of the civilian crisis management unit at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Mid-June is an important turning point, because that is when Kosovo's constitution takes effect. After that, the UN is not supposed to represent Kosovo on the international stage.

When Kosovo declared its independence on February 17th, the thinking was that four months would be a sufficient period of transition. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, EULEX KOSOVO, was set up right away, and it was supposed to have begun replacing the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).



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However, diplomats say that in three months it has not been possible to agree even on bringing in personnel, office facilities, and vehicles, to say nothing of more significant political development. EULEX should have international personnel numbering 1,900, but for now, there are only a few hundred there.

Contrary to what had been expected in leading Western countries, the recognition of Kosovo's independence has not proceeded as smoothly as planned.

Of the EU's 27 member states, eight (Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic) have not recognised Kosovo's independence. One consequence of this is that little can be discussed about Kosovo's problems in the European Council.

"Everything leaks", said one diplomat.

Meanwhile, at the UN, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been very hesitant to take a stand on how the UN operation in Kosovo is to be shifted over to the EU.

Diplomatic sources say that the new Secretary-General, who is more cautious than his predecessor, has faced tremendous pressure from Russia, which along with Serbia has consistently opposed Kosovo's independence, and Russia is using its veto to prevent the matter from moving ahead in the UN Security Council.

The deadlock is to be discussed on Wednesday in negotiations between the EU and UN, at which time it may be announced that the EU operation is initially ready to move forward, even if no real progress is made.

No real alternatives to shifting supervision of Kosovo to the EU will be proposed in the talks. Theoretical options include the withdrawal of Kosovo's declaration of independence, as Russia is calling for, but that is not a real possibility. Another option would be to leave the independent Kosovo without any international supervision, which is something that nobody wants.

Also, no alternatives have been put forward to the plan drawn up by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari.

The plan gives detailed guarantees for the safety of Kosovo's Serb minority.

Problems linked with supervision of Kosovo are not limited to the impasse between the EU and UN.

There are no guarantees that EU representatives would have any scope for operating in the north of Kosovo, which is populated by the Serb minority. There are no official



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agreements on cooperation between the EULEX and the NATO-led KFOR forces.

The Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is supervising the democracy process in Kosovo, has not been able to initiate cooperation with EULEX because of opposition from Russia and Serbia.

However, for now, other problems pale alongside those linked with cooperation between the UN and the EU.