A dialogue without a platform and unity: What could the awaited consequences for Kosovo be?

Arbër Fetahu

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A DIALOGUE WITHOUT A PLATFORM AND UNITY: WHAT COULD THE AWAITED CONSEQUENCES FOR KOSOVO BE?

By: Arbër Fetahu – Research Fellow at GLPS

The resumption of Kosovo – Serbia dialogue resumed after almost 20 months. Arguably, this could be considered good news, as various attempts have been made by international and local actors for this to happen. Amidst political chaos and the failed Washington meeting, Kosovo’s prime minister Avdullah Hoti managed to attend the new resumed round of the dialogue meetings. While a good picture has been taken presenting the EU flag in the background, the meeting revealed two shortcomings regarding Kosovo’s team. First, Kosovo’s government lacked a clear platform regarding the objectives, the topics, and the strategy for the talks. Secondly, it revealed the lack of political unity and public consensus on the matter – both of which are the basic preconditions for the talks to bear fruit.

Kosovo’s minister presented the so-called ‘framework’ for the dialogue at the Academy of Sciences of Kosovo, which to a large extent reflect the articles of Kosovo’s constitution.1 The constitution is the fundamental document to guide the process, however, it is not sufficient when dealing with the Serbian counterpart which has been proven by almost a decade of negotiations. As in previous cases, the Kosovo government once again failed to include opposition parties and other political actors to form a state platform. It has been crucial to realize a written document that stipulates the themes and objectives that Kosovo wants to achieve in the dialogue. The dialogue has thus been incorporated into the government’s program 2020-2023 in Chapter 7, which is the only official written document on the matter.2 While the dialogue with Serbia was initially perceived as a crucial part of Kosovo’s state-building process – the approach and actions run counter to that.

The statement that the ‘dialogue has no alternative’ has been repeated for many years, especially by the current prime minister Hoti. However, stating it as a matter of fact does not serve the future of the dialogue.

Furthermore, Kosovo’s delegation showed a lack of unity within the governing coalition and it fully lacks the support of the opposition parties – which are divided by all manners. Given that this government was appointed amidst the pandemic COVID-19 crisis, and the controversy on the continuation of the dialogue, the disunification presents a difficult obstacle. Kosovo hence resumed the talks in a disadvantaged position, which meant showing weakness at the first meeting. While the Serbian team is monolithic and does not face the issue of legitimacy, the contrary can be argued for Kosovo’s team. The asymmetry between two teams may produce problematic results, bearing in mind that the implementation of agreements, besides numbers in the parliament, requires social and political cohesion. Despite good intentions by the EU mediators for the resumption of the talks, the process is accompanied by old obstacles. Additionally, the EU is still not clarifying the goals of the dialogue.

As a result, the resumption of talks on 16 July 2020 produced little results. The biggest result was the meeting itself. Both countries remain in entrenched positions: Kosovo is aiming for mutual recognition, while Serbia aims to gain a substantial win from the talks, without recognizing Kosovo’s statehood. The consent to discuss the issue of missing and displaced persons in the upcoming meetings paved the way for a more technical discussion, while in principle the talks were not agreed to focus upon this issue. It therefore shows that the dialogue is swiftly leaning into a

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1 https://www.evropaelire.org/a/30663302.html
technical one. With all that being said, the resumption of the dialogue should not be considered a strong indication that it may conclude quickly.

Over the years, it has time and time again become clear that there is an unequivocal need for political unity and social cohesion, in order for the talks to succeed and agreements to be implemented. The dialogue is a vital interest of the state, and should therefore be understood as such. The attempts to privatize the process will harm the interests of the state. Against this backdrop, Kosovo's government should aim to create cohesion within the country, in order to represent its interests in a clear inclusive state platform. If an inclusive vision can’t be realized, the dialogue is likely deemed to produce controversial results, or even worse – fail.
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