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## **ALBIN KURTI FIRST VISIT TO BRUSSELS CAN MARK A NEW TURN FOR KOSOVO-EU RELATIONS, PROVIDED THAT HIS CHOICES APPROPRIATE**

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After casting his vote in general elections in Albania, a gesture symbolizing his conviction that the future of Kosovo and Albania is intertwined, Prime Minister Kurti confirmed his first official visit to Brussels after his re-election.

While a visit to Brussels for Kosovar leaders is not odd, Kurti's visit marks an event that might celebrate the starting of a new era of cooperation, or, likewise, a period of mistrust and tension between Kosovo and EU institutions. Because Kosovo leaders, including Mr. Kurti, do not antagonize the EU, the assumption that Mr. Kurti can hurt Kosovo –EU relations might be perceived as radical. However Kurti's (Government) Plan about the future of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, likely reinstatement of reciprocity measures with Serbia and Bosnia, and his wary about the EU representatives in the dialogue are some of the reasons why his relations with the EU can become both delicate and difficult. Although these premises remain yet to be tested, Prime Minister Kurti needs to use this opportunity and prove us wrong.

### **I. Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue**

Commitment to Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and firm determination for a final solution, based on the premise that Kosovo is recognized as a State and admitted in the UN are introductory steps that he needs to clarify with Brussels. The EU and its member states continue to agree that neither Kosovo nor Serbia can continue to inflame instability in the region and corroborate the EU as powerless actor within its region of influence. Moreover, the EU message is clear, final and legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia remains a precondition for accession in the EU. Kosovo's commitment to the dialogue will not only correspond to the EU's unified stance about the dialogue, but will likewise help Kosovo address its relations with Serbia within a principled dialogue framework. Provided that Mr. Kurti relaxed and languid leadership style is not mirrored in his foreign policy, his sharpness in defining choices might be a key to his success in the dialogue. There is little to make Mr. Kurti doubt about his would-be historic success in this process, if the aims to re-shape the dialogue and unite Kosovar leadership are achieved.

### **II. ERA**

Prime Minister Kurti should relaunch the European Reform Agenda, and redefine its priorities in the Stabilization and Association Process. Irrespective of the perception that Kosovo's accession perspective is not clear and not yet confirmed, Kosovo needs to pursue an agenda that electrifies the stabilization and association dialogue and maximizes its benefit. Political instability in the recent years has shifted the focus of Kosovo institutions from the European integration efforts, with the new majority in power, it's time to put the European agenda at our forefront.

### **III. Visa Liberalization**

Since both the Commission and the EU Parliament have confirmed their support for visa liberalization for Kosovo, Mr. Kurti needs to prioritize a policy that aims to end the isolation of Kosovo citizens and by the end of the year, and achieve the visa liberalization. However, PM Kurti should be prepared to afford every assurance that abuse with visa free regime will be managed

and, if need be, to take immediate steps to control the inflow of potential visitors from Kosovo in Schengen countries.

#### **IV. Kosovo relations with the European Parliament**

The European Parliament is an institution that has continuously supported Kosovo. Kosovo Assembly, in and Levizja Vetevendosje! as the biggest parliamentary group, should change the current impasse and do more to expand communication with the EU Parliament. Defining an agenda that makes possible to discuss issues of joint interest and initiate joint efforts to tackle matters of mutual concern is the first step in this endeavor. Limited communication within the framework of SAA is clearly not enough.

#### **V. Reforming the Judiciary**

Kurti's Government has launched the working group for the reform in justice sector and initiated the design of the vetting process for judges and prosecutors. Agreeing to design the vetting process with joint EU-US involvement is yet another pledge that Mr. Kurti needs to affirm. A successful vetting process, as the practice of neighboring countries shows, relies on the ability of the country to implement practices that mimic the best experiences and refuses previous mistakes. The EU involvement remains important to guarantee the quality of vetting and justice reform but also to legitimize Government efforts.

#### **VI. Vaccines**

The last point is about COVID Vaccines. Despite that Kosovo is persistently refusing to contract Chinese and Russian vaccines, aligning itself with the majority of the EU countries, such efforts are not appropriately appreciated by most of the EU countries. Therefore, Mr. Kurti should retell Kosovo's position and ask the EU to support Kosovo obtain necessary vaccines.

#### **VII. Support his priorities**

Finally, every leader that hosted PM Kurti in Brussels has recognized that convincing him to renounce his ideas is mission impossible, but persuading him to prioritize his actions is not. With that in mind, the EU should be able to spot Kosovo's priorities and afford Mr. Kurti sufficient support to teed Kosovo up for changes in the near future.

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