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MINORITY ISSUES



EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES – ECMI KOSOVO

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Monthly Newsletter **SEPTEMBER 2008**

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

I. Internal and Int'l Political Developments

I-1 United Nation General Assembly Session

I-1.a Serbia's International Court of Justice Initiative

On Tuesday, 16 Sept. Serbia's motion to put the question of Kosovo's status to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was approved by the UN General Committee to be put to discussion by the United Nations General Assembly (GA). In Serbia this diplomatic move has widely been considered a success. According to Serbian Foreign Minister Jeremić some countries had strongly advocated the acceptance of the draft resolution, primarily Spain, Egypt and Argentina, as well as some other countries. The ICJ initiative will come up for voting in the GA, on 8 Oct.

Prime Minister Thaçi reaction: Kosovo does not fear ICJ initiative

Commenting on Serbia's ICJ initiative, Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi said that the path of Kosovo's future passes through Brussels and Washington, not Belgrade. Speaking before the Kosovo assembly, Thaçi said that Serbia's initiative would not help improve its relations with Kosovo: "By doing this, Serbia is once again proving that its policy has no vision when it comes to peace, stability, cooperation and integration within Euro-Atlantic structures". Thaçi said that in spite of the situation created within the GA, there is no possibility of disappointment. Prime Minister Thaçi said that even if the question reached the ICJ, there is no way that the court would rule against Kosovo independence.

EU's Reaction

French UN Ambassador Jean-Maurice Riper said that Belgrade's initiative at the UN was not aiding efforts to accelerate Serbia's European integration. Riper said that consultations on Belgrade's initiative were under way within the EU with a view to achieving EU unanimity with regard to voting on the resolution.

Serbia's President's Reaction

Serbian President Tadić said that he believed the General Committee's decision to put the Serbian initiative on the agenda was the fruit of Belgrade's diplomatic efforts. He added that this did not mean that the job was done, as the vote at the GA still lies ahead, the result of which, he said, was uncertain.

I-1.b Kosovo President and Foreign Affairs Minister diplomatic activity at the UN GA

Kosovo's President Fatmir Sejdiu and Foreign Minister Skënder Hyseni continue their busy diplomatic schedule at the UN, meeting world leaders in order to seek recognition of Kosovo's independence and influence these countries to side against Serbia's ICJ resolution. During their visit to New York, Sejdiu and Hyseni met with the US delegation led by President Bush. Additionally, Kosovo's President and Foreign Minister met with former UN Envoy for Status Talks, Mr. Marti Ahtisaari and International Civilian Representative Mr. Pieter Feith. This meeting involved discussion on the current political situation and the recognition process. In addition, Kosovo leaders met with various diplomats and leaders including: NATO Secretary General Jaap De Scheffer, Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski, Montenegrin President Filip Vujanović, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kuchner, Foreign Minister of Turkey Ali Babajan, Foreign Minister of Croatia Ivo Sanader, President of Panama Samuel Luis Navaro, Foreign Minister of Egypt Ahmed Gheit, and Foreign Minister of Malaysia Rais Yatim. The two Kosovo leaders have also held meetings with their counterparts from Benin, Guinea, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, Zambia, Uganda and many other countries informing them on developments in Kosovo.

Many diplomats congratulated Kosovo on the work done on the advancement of the position of communities in Kosovo and promised that they would closely follow all developments in Kosovo and the region.

I-2 Zannier continued interactions with Belgrade and other stakeholders

On Friday, 12 Sept. UNMIK chief Lamberto Zannier met Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanović in Belgrade to continue technical negotiations on the judiciary, the police, expropriated Serb property in Kosovo and the issue of kidnapped and missing persons. Zannier and Bogdanović also discussed the problem of humanitarian aid transport, including the distribution of medicine in Kosovo as well as other issues of concern. They agreed to continue talks at the technical level.

Moreover, Zannier addressed the Permanent Council of the OSCE on Thursday, 4 Sept. where he said that the UNMIK is no longer able to fully exercise its authorities. Zannier reiterated that the Albanian majority does not accept its authority and only refers to the Kosovo Constitution, while, formally, UNMIK still had to continue exercising its mandate in keeping with Resolution 1244. The UNMIK chief advocated a greater role for the OSCE throughout the territory of Kosovo, stressing that it was necessary to reassess the organisation's activities on the ground.

I-3 UNMIK to stay in Serb areas

UNMIK Deputy Chief David Harland says the UN mission will stay in Serb areas in spite of large personnel cuts. "We currently have around 4,000 staff in Kosovo, the majority of who are in the police. The mission will be scaled down by roughly 70 percent over the next three months," said Harland. Moreover, he said that the remaining 30 percent of UNMIK personnel would be able to

depart if EULEX representatives reached an agreement with Serbia on deploying the EU mission in areas inhabited by Serbs, and if the UN Security Council endorses such a decision.

I-4 European Commission says Kosovo is heading for EU

Kosovo is close to starting the EU stabilisation and association process, European Commission (EC) Director for the Western Balkans Pierre Mirel said on Friday, 12 Sept. after meeting Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu. "Even though Kosovo has still not signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), the country is part of that process," he said, adding that discussions on Kosovo will begin at the EC within two or three months. He cautioned, though, that Kosovo would need to fulfil a number of obligations and to ensure good neighbourly relations. President Sejdiu, meanwhile, pledged that Kosovo would work towards signing the SAA. He urged the EC to try and help Kosovo secure recognition from those EU members that have not extended it yet.

II. Additional Recognitions of Independence

II-1 Samoa recognizes Kosovo

During the reporting period, the Pacific island of Samoa has recognized Kosovo's independence, becoming the 47th country to recognize Kosovo. "We believe that Kosovo independence will receive further recognitions, which would help end the conflict of the 1990s that inflicted such harm on the Western Balkans and would stabilize the region," states a note signed by Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi.

Kosovo diplomatic sources have stated that they have indications that Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar will join the list of countries that have recognized Kosovo soon.

ECMI PROJECT ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period, ECMI was engaged in advancing activities in three principal areas of its work in Kosovo.

I. Communities Consultative Council

I-1 On Monday 15 September the President of Kosovo, Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu announced the promulgation of the Presidential Decree on the Consultative Council for Communities of Kosovo (CCC), thus officially establishing the Council as a permanent body. This announcement followed a meeting by the CCC on Friday 12 September, when the Council met to discuss this Decree. This meeting was chaired by the President of Kosovo and was attended by representatives from all Kosovo's minority communities, the International Civilian Office (ICO), and ECMI. Several small comments were made, but on the whole the Presidential Decree was accepted and appreciated as a clear and comprehensive document. However, the representatives also made it clear that the true test for the CCC is yet to come; it is in its practical functioning that the CCC will have to show that it can have a real effect on issues that matter to the communities they represent. In October ECMI will be organising workshops to get the communities ready for the selection of candidates for the Council.

II. Support to the Office of the Prime Minister

II-1 In September ECMI initiated a new project. ECMI will develop an ethno-political map of Kosovo, the first comprehensive database on communities in Kosovo. The database will contain all relevant information on communities and make this information easily accessible. In this way the ethno-political map of Kosovo will serve both as a way of increasing knowledge and awareness on communities in Kosovo and as a practical tool for the government and other organisations in their dealings with communities. During the reporting period ECMI has hired field researchers and started with the data collection process. The development of the ethno-political map is part of a larger ECMI project funded by the Swiss FDA and aimed at supporting the Office of the Prime Minister

and communities in Kosovo.

III. Support to the Decentralisation Process

III-1 ECMI has continued to work within the Working Group for Information Campaign on Decentralisation. This month the Working Group went to the final stages of developing commercials part of a campaign to increase the awareness on the decentralisation process. ECMI reviewed the messages and slogans that the organisation designed in order to ensure that these messages are sensitive to minority communities in Kosovo and cause no offence or provocations. The commercials were aired in the end of September on both television and radio.

The Working Group is planning further activities as part of the public awareness campaign. One of these activities will be the organisation of television debates on the decentralisation process and its implementation. ECMI will contribute to these debates by assisting the design of the agenda and in creating the participant list.

IV. Other Developments

IV-1 During the reporting period, ECMI has welcomed different guests and has held a range of meetings, both internal and with relevant stakeholders, on issues of mutual interest. ECMI met with various key actors and community representatives to establish initial contact, open discussions on possible future co-operation, discuss the status of approved legislation and needs to move forward with projects, and to obtain general background information on current issues relating to minorities in Kosovo.

IV-2 On Thursday, 11 Sept. ECMI attended a conference organised by the Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC) on their latest report on ethnic communities in Kosovo. The conference was attended by representatives of communities from political parties and civil society, and by representatives of the Kosovo government and the international community.

IV-3 During the reporting period, ECMI hired former intern Kelley Thompson to support ECMI Kosovo's activities. ECMI also said goodbye to intern Arianna Rondos and would like to thank her for her valuable support particularly on the decentralisation project. At the same time ECMI has welcomed a new intern, Lars Burema.

Report Ends;