

Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina in the context of European integration

Challenges for the Republic of Serbia's regional policy

Proceedings of a policy roundtable organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation Serbia, the Center for Foreign Policy and the Democratization Policy Council
Belgrade, December 10, 2013

Authors: Bodo Weber and Kurt Bassuener

Introduction

On December 10, 2013 in Belgrade, the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBS) in Serbia, the Center for Foreign Policy (CFP), Belgrade and the Democratization Policy Council (DPC) held a policy roundtable entitled “Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina in the context of European integration.” This event was third in a series of roundtables on Serbia’s policy towards neighboring countries organized by HBS and DPC in 2013, in cooperation with other local partners (including CFP and the European Movement in Serbia). The roundtable was held as an open, public event.

The aim of the event was to promote a broad public discussion in Serbia on the ongoing EU-facilitated political dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina. The organizers also intended to promote direct dialogue between the Serbian and the Kosovo society, broadening it beyond the closed Brussels negotiations limited to government representatives. In addition, the organizers aimed at fostering dialogue between Kosovo Serbs and Serbia, as well as among Kosovo Serb representatives from all parts of Kosovo and from across the political spectrum. The political dialogue organized under the auspices of the European External Action Service (EEAS) opened a new chapter in relations between Belgrade and Prishtina with the signing of the agreement on normalization of relations between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo on April 19, 2013 and the subsequent agreement on an implementation plan in May the same year. The Belgrade roundtable took place at a crucial political moment – only days after the second round of local elections in Kosovo and ten days before an EU Council summit that was to decide on a date for the opening of accession talks with Serbia, based on the assessment of Serbia’s efforts in implementing the April Agreement.

The roundtable assembled policy makers, foreign policy experts, and academics, as well as representatives of civil society organizations from Serbia and Kosovo. Diplomats from the EU and EU member states also participated, as did two MPs from the German Bundestag. The event was pioneering in several aspects. It for the first time brought together Kosovo civil society representatives to a public event in Belgrade in significant numbers. The event was also novel in that it convened Kosovo Serb political representatives from North and South of the river Ibar – and from Belgrade-supported and opposition political groups – to a common public forum in the Serbian capital. Kosovo Serb representatives participating in the Kosovo government and parliament made their first public appearance in Belgrade at the roundtable..

This paper summarizes the proceedings, consisting of two separate but related discussions. The first topic was the state of the implementation of the April Agreement after the local elections. The second dealt with the future of the political dialogue in 2014, as well as the EU integration processes of Serbia and Kosovo.

I. Conference opening

The organizers opened with a few introductory remarks. Aleksandra Joksimović, Director of the Center for Foreign Policy, stressed that the April Agreement presented a breakthrough that had demonstrated that agreements between Serbia and Kosovo are possible. She expressed her belief that the ongoing dialogue process was irreversible. She noted that for years conflicting statements coming out of the EU generated public confusion in Serbia. Germany's clear messaging as to the Union's expectations from Serbia in relation to the Kosovo issue were also crucial, in her view. Reflecting on the then-prevalent debate in Serbia on when accession talks with the EU would begin (end of December 2013 or end of January 2014), she noted that this was superfluous – the difference would be measured in days. She added that the accession negotiations framework remained unclear. But it was certain that Chapter 35 would be turned into a Kosovo chapter for Serbia. Joksimović also reminded the audience that the framework agreement might remain non-public.

Finally, Joksimović raised the April Agreement and questioned its further implementation, which had generally stalled in the run-up to the local elections. In the first round of the dialogue following the elections, an agreement over the issue of police had been reached on December 5, while the issue of the integration of the judiciary in northern Kosovo was on the agenda of the upcoming December 13 meeting in Brussels. At the same time, Joksimović remarked the question of the status and competencies of the Association of Serb Municipalities (ZSO) remained unresolved, generating sharp conflicting rhetoric between Belgrade and Prishtina. She closed by noting that the approaching elections to the European Parliament, general elections in Kosovo, as well as possible early elections in Serbia posed major challenges for the continuation of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

Andreas Poltermann, Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's office in Belgrade, stressed that many saw the April agreement as "historic." Yet he warned that the EU was about to start accession talks with Serbia without the country's having recognized borders. This had to be resolved before Serbia could enter the Union, in his view. Serbia's government had continued its regional cooperation, but that many issues still remained unsolved - such as relations with neighboring Croatia. Poltermann held the view that the Kosovo status dispute diverts attention from the maintenance of weak states in both Serbia and Kosovo. Both countries thus needed substantial EU support, to feel the transformative power of Europe in order to overcome these weaknesses. He noted that Kosovo's society was united over the country's EU-perspective and asked whether this was also the case in Serbia. He made this remark in connection with a recent statement by the Russian Ambassador to Belgrade Aleksandr Chepurin¹ and the special conditions that Serbia acquires through its participation in the Southstream pipeline project. According to Poltermann, this arrangement puts Serbia in conflict with the Energy Community Treaty with the EU. He saw this issue as soluble, but

1

raised the question of how Serbia's relationship with Russia would affect the normalization of its relationship with Kosovo and with the EU.

German Ambassador Ernst Wilhelm gave the opening speech. He complimented the organizers on the perfect timing of the event, ahead of the EU Council's decision to begin accession talks with Serbia (this was announced on December 20). He stressed that the Council's decision was whether accession talks would be opened, not just when. This would depend on the fulfillment of clearly defined conditions related to the implementation of the April Agreement. Of those, he added, the police issue had recently been solved, while the judiciary remained on the agenda. He added that the second round of local elections went well. He explained that the establishment of the Association of Serb Municipalities remained unimplemented, but that it would no longer be a condition for the Council's decision.

Ambassador Wilhelm reflected on the launch of the political dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina. When he assumed his post in September 2012, he remarked, Germany had negative expectations of the new Serbian government's future Kosovo policy. The dialogue had changed German perceptions of Serbia. The Ambassador noted that the dialogue would proceed as a process parallel to the accession negotiations. Beyond resolving the question of the Association of Serb Municipalities, he identified both refugee return and property ownership as potential issues for future dialogue.

Ambassador Wilhelm then referred to the public debate in Serbia on the German-British non-paper on the accession framework, especially in relation to the discussion whether Kosovo would be covered by Chapter 35 only or should be touched upon in other chapters as well. He explained that the normalization of relations with Kosovo was an important issue in the accession process and therefore would form a separate chapter. But he added that the Kosovo issue could not be limited to one chapter only. By its very nature, the Kosovo question would appear in many other chapters - for example in the chapter on transport, in relation to the Belgrade-Prishtina highway. It would thus make no sense, he insisted, to finalize chapters disregarding Kosovo aspects only to end up in conflict with Chapter 35 and then have to *re-open* those chapters. The ambassador explained the non-paper would not mean Germany sets new conditions for Serbia's accession.

Ambassador Wilhelm opined that the current Serbian government had done a lot to improve relations with neighboring countries. He listed the first visit by a Montenegrin Prime Minister since 2006, taking place that very day, the recent visit of Croatian President Ivo Josipović to Belgrade, joint government meetings with Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Serbian Foreign Minister's recent visit to Albania. Concerning Belgrade's relationship with Russia, the ambassador expressed the view that Serbia without a doubt wants to join the EU – this would not put into question the country's strong ties with Russia.

A conference participant asked pointedly whether the EU's conditions for Serbia on Kosovo represented a form of blackmail. Ambassador Wilhelm rejected this characterization in his response. The EU is sovereign to set its own conditions on candidate countries, he insisted. The Union would not repeat the mistake it made with Cyprus and therefore will not accept countries with open border questions as new members. It is Serbia's sovereign decision to decide whether it wants to join the EU under such conditions or not.

I. Panel I: Brussels Agreement after local elections – towards the full implementation?

The first panel featured three speakers from Prishtina: Leon Malazogu, Director of the think-tank *Development for Democracy*; Oliver Ivanović, President of the political party *Serbia, Democracy, Justice* (SDP) from north Mitrovica; and Danijela Vujičić from the Belgrade-supported *Civil Initiative Srpska*. In addition, Dušan Janjić, the president of the party *Active Serbia* from Belgrade spoke. DPC Senior Associate Kurt Bassuener concluded in a commentator role.

Leon Malazogu gave an overview of the recently held local elections in Kosovo, noting that very little information had reached Serbia about these elections apart from those held in the four Serb majority municipalities in the north. He labeled the elections in the rest of the country as a major breakthrough in terms of election conduct when compared to the 2010 general elections in Kosovo. There had been almost no fraud and very little vote-buying. Yet technical problems remained an issue, leading to a high number of invalid ballots. He consequently characterized the elections as the best ever organized in Kosovo, including the 2000 elections organized by the OSCE.

Malazogu called the election's outcome an "electoral earthquake." Voters had voted strongly against incumbent mayors. No single party benefitted in the aggregate for voters' anger. In Prishtina, Shpend Ahmeti defeated Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) party president Isa Mustafa based on his personal draw, not because of his party affiliation with Vetevendosje. Vetevendosje, Malazogu noted, lost one third of the votes it had received in the last general elections. The strongest opposition party, the LDK, won only in municipalities where it had not been in power. Malazogu compared those characteristics of the election outcome with the Serbian Progressive Party's (SNS) success in the 2012 general elections, in which citizens had voted against the incumbent Democratic Party's non-performance on corruption.

Oliver Ivanović assessed the elections in northern Kosovo. He characterized the election campaign as strange. In the four Serb-majority municipalities, he noted, election campaign was dominated by the confrontation between advocates and opponents of the April agreement (and the required elections). This fight that was concentrated in the urban centers of Mitrovica and Zvečan, producing the incidents that forced the repetition of the first round of elections in northern Mitrovica. The more rural municipalities of Leposavić and Zubin Potok were decided in the first round. Ivanović ventured that high voter turnout in Serb municipalities south of the Ibar had helped to cool down tempers in the north. He noticed a mentality shift after the successful completion of the first round of elections in north Mitrovica was completed, so that the second round of mayoral elections became a choice between two candidates (not two positions). In his opinion, the Serbian community had started to understand that Serbia has changed its position vis-à-vis northern Kosovo and that they had perceived participation in the local elections as obeying Belgrade. He insisted Belgrade's opinion would always be decisive for Serbs in northern Kosovo.

Ivanović expressed fear that the current pace of the dialogue could boomerang. He asked from the international community not to demand solutions too quickly, as Kosovo was an emotional issue for Serbs.

He stressed the need to strengthen the Serb community in Kosovo to be able to take autonomous decisions on matters of local concern. Ivanović observed a change in the political dynamic, with new faces elected. He demanded that the local administration deal with local topics, as his party had insisted in its election campaign.

Regarding the Association of Serb Municipalities (ZSO), Ivanović noted the legal obligation of mayors to take office and municipal councils to convene within 30 days. The definition of the ZSO's competencies as well as the procedure for its establishment remained unclear. He expressed his expectation that the Association would handle health care and education.

Danijela Vujičić also referred to the Association of Municipalities, observing that the ZSO could not be financed from the Kosovo budget because the government in Prishtina refuses to recognize it as a public institution, as Belgrade demands. She stressed that for Serbs in northern Kosovo, the Association needs to possess the authority to organize everyday life.

On the dialogue, she noted that Serbs in northern Kosovo will continue to look to Belgrade for guidance. But that the interests of citizens in the north be taken into account by Belgrade. She remarked that the process begun with the April agreement is completely new, including its impact on municipal finance. She insisted that a parallel dialogue on the lower level is also needed, for example between the mayors of south and north Mitrovica, for example. Vujičić drew attention to the fact that collection of customs duties at the northern border crossing would begin on December 14. Since details had not yet been agreed, she expected chaos to result.

Dušan Janjić commented on Oliver Ivanović's questioning the speed of the process, countering that 11 years had already been lost. He observed that the government in Prishtina had spun the implementation of the April agreement in a predictable way, yet on Belgrade's side two factions had developed. One focused on negotiating with Brussels, the other on legalizing Serb parallelism in Kosovo. In his view, local elections had extended Kosovo's sovereignty to the north.

Janjić noted that the ZSO would be established by the municipalities and that many details that seem to be of technical nature are in fact political, and therefore need to be solved in Brussels. The Government of Kosovo would need to transfer some competencies to the Association.

Leon Malazogu returned to the theme of Serbian-Russian relations, expressing the view the Russian threat was a bluff by Belgrade. Concerning the potential interference of elections in 2014 in the continuation of the political dialogue, he was of the opinion that if Kosovo, the EU and Serbia all went to elections at the same time, this would be good: there would be a four-year mandate to get things done. He observed that thus far, Serbia and Kosovo do not cooperate, but rather bargain and negotiate. In his opinion both governments do only a minimum required of them by the European Union, while they play for advantage exploiting EU disunity. Malazogu added that Serbia's avoidance of the Kosovo issue has left Kosovo as

part of its EU accession process. In his view, citizens of both Kosovo and Serbia demand dialogue, proving that they are ahead of their politicians.

He criticized Belgrade for not only not recognizing Kosovo, but actively damaging Kosovo's interests. For example, Malazogu asked how Belgrade benefitted by denying overflight to planes bound for Prishtina – a policy that inflicted significant economic damage on Kosovo. In addition, he noted that a railway line for future high-speed trains from Western Europe to Istanbul could run through Kosovo once political conditions would be met. This would benefit Serbia at least as much as Kosovo.

Oliver Ivanović countered that Prishtina also had not entered into the dialogue in good faith, but instead tried to realize three aims – integration of the north, international recognition, and visa liberalization. He defined the Brussels agreement as an interest-led marriage. Ivanović noted a marked radicalization of Albanian NGOs that are financed by the West.

Citizens in the north were increasingly focused upon socio-economic issues, which he saw as a positive development. He then turned to the issue of the future of the educational and health care system in the north. He stressed that health care in the Serb majority municipalities needed to be reorganized, that the question of financing needed to be addressed, and that the number of existing institutions presented a problem. In relation to Serb education, he insisted that the Serbian curricula needed to remain but that financing of the educational system need to be organized through the Association of Municipalities. He expressed his conviction that any move to end the Serbian curriculum would not only be rejected by Serb citizens but also lead to their exodus from Kosovo.

Ivanović also drew attention to the problem of employment in Serb municipalities, which is currently dominated by the public sector. This demands rationalization. Such a process, he insisted, needed to be slow, needed to be supported with funds, and would have to be accompanied by a change of mentality, reorienting it toward private business. Finally, he touched upon the issue of the protection of sites belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) in Kosovo. He praised the recently formed Kosovo special police unit. He opined that this unit did not need to be mono-ethnically Serb, but that it was even better the unit has a multiethnic, Serb-Albanian composition. He also stressed the important role of KFOR in the protection of these sites.

Dijana Vujačić noted the importance of EU-funds to support cross-border projects. That is, IPA funds for future cooperation between the four northern municipalities and those in Central Serbia. She agreed that education is a crucial issue for people in northern Kosovo.

Dušan Janjić noted two sensitive issues for the future integration of northern Kosovo with the Republic of Kosovo. First, the effects of local elections on the change of relationships among Kosovo Serb political elites and the role Serbia will play in these changes. He mentioned an alleged plan to turn the Citizens Initiative Srpska into a political party in the run-up to the Kosovo general elections in 2014, asking what the political orientation of such a party would be. He then raised the legacy of the 1999 war. He mentioned the existence of Serb veteran organizations in the north and the open question of the payment of Serb war veterans' pensions in a future Kosovo state framework. Veterans would also need professional medical help to deal with war trauma.

Janjić stated that more work on the details of the implementation of the April agreement was needed. He raised the possible scenario of Serbian policemen in the north who would not integrate into the Kosovo police system, but rather transfer to Serbian police in Central Serbia. Such a development, he warned, would ultimately lead to the exodus of policemen and their families from Kosovo. Regarding to the protection of the Serb Orthodox Church in Kosovo, Janjić suggested that Annex 5 of the Ahtisaari plan that dealt with the issue should be confirmed through the Brussels negotiations.

Commenting on the panelists statements, Kurt Bassuener of the Democratization Policy Council emphasized that it was important not to lose sight of the the endpoint of the political dialogue – mutual recognition between Serbia and Kosovo, as defined by Germany, the US and UK, the main Western powers.

Bassuener agreed that many open questions should have been solved a long time ago – 14 years had been lost to shape the development of Kosovo. Northern Kosovo Serbs had paid the greatest price for this. He reminded the conference participants that integration of Serbs south of the Ibar had progressed a great deal, and it would be a travesty if this was undercut in implementation of the April agreement. He noted that the Association of Municipalities, once it was established, should work towards defining what it can do separately from Belgrade.

In the subsequent discussion with the audience, Engjellushe Morina, director of the *Kosovo Council on Foreign Relations* asserted that the EU integration process is very much about citizens' participation, but that in the political dialogue between Prishtina and Belgrade there was no role for citizens.

In reaction to Kurt Bassuener's comments, Oliver Ivanović criticized the EU's approach to Serbia as both unique and unfair. He warned the EU that openly conditioning Serbia's EU membership on recognizing Kosovo would not have negative effects and opined that it would lead to a drastic drop in support for EU-integration among Serbia's citizens.

Leon Malazogu noted that the time for slow solutions had passed in 1999. He stated that the integration of Serbs south of the Ibar had been undercut by the Serbia List in the local elections. He stressed that nobody in Prishtina intended to change the Serbian curricula in Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo. He also dismissed the notion that there had been any radicalization of the Albanian civil society in Kosovo.

II. **Panel II: Looking at 2014 – continued dialogue and EU integration processes**

Prior to the second panel, Ambassador Michael Davenport, the head of the EU Delegation to Serbia gave an opening speech and took a few questions from the participants.

Davenport stated that with the EU Council's decision of June 28, 2013 to open accession negotiations with Serbia launched a new phase in the country's relations with the EU. Accession negotiations would begin with the screening for Chapters 23 and 24. He noted that a European Commission review mission was currently in Belgrade. He complimented the Serbian government for actively preparing the screening and stressed that Belgrade had

the responsibility to not only develop reform strategies as it has done so far (on anti-corruption, public administration reform etc.), but to actually implement them.

Regarding implementation of the April agreement, especially the local elections, the Ambassador asserted that it was not a simple process – but that nobody expected it to be. Apart from the northern Mitrovica incident, local elections had proceeded successfully. He noted that work on the agreement's implementation had continued despite the concentrated attention paid to elections.

Davenport stressed that the decision on a date for the opening of accession talks with Serbia was for the EU member states to take and that the report of High Representative Lady Catherine Ashton would play an important role. In relation to the ongoing discussion on the negotiation framework he stated that the decision remained open, but that Kosovo would be a key issue in any case. When asked why it was announced that the accession framework document would not be made public, the ambassador explained that it was a contractual relationship between the EU and the future member state. Governments of different candidate countries had different models for the accession process; they assigned different roles to national parliaments in the integration process. He noted that the framework agreement was not a public document and that it was up to the candidate country's government as to whether it would publicize the agreement or not. Montenegro, for example, had put its framework agreement on the government website.

Davenport insisted the EU values the role of wider civil society in the EU integration process. He explained that there were no dominant reform areas conditioned in the framework agreement. All reform areas were equally important, including, for example, legislation on environmental protection.

Bodo Weber, Senior Associate of the *Democratization Policy Council*, chaired the second panel. Speakers on the panel from Prishtina included: Engjellushe Morina, Director of the *Kosovo Council on Foreign Relations*, Ilir Deda, Executive Director of *KIPRED* and Petar Miletić, Vice President of the Assembly of Kosovo. From Belgrade: Nenad Đurđević, Coordinator of the *Forum for Ethnic Relations* as well as Professor Predrag Simic from the *European Movement in Serbia* as commentator.

Weber opened the panel with a few introductory remarks. He expressed his view that contrary to a commonly held view in the Western Balkans, the EU was *not* applying double standards in its conditionality-based integration policy towards the region. Rather, EU integration was a work in progress, a learning curve based on negative experiences with previous candidate countries like Bulgaria, Romania, and Cyprus. Weber also noted that the Union's current approach to Serbia was the result of experiences with the previous Serbian government. That relationship had been based on the mutual pretence of dealing with the Kosovo issue, a policy which led to the outbreak of violence in northern Kosovo in summer 2011. That derailed this dynamic. A German-led shift of the EU's policy toward Serbia derived from this confrontation with reality, yielding a policy of tough conditionality.

Engjellushe Morina opened the discussion with a critical take on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. She insisted that the implementation of the April agreement was not a great success, referring to incidents during the first round of local elections on November 3. Considering the importance of the police and judiciary to Kosovo's sovereignty, the Brussels-

driven arrangements to deviate from these state structures meant unraveling the Ahtisaari Plan. She added that the minimal transparency in the dialogue to date had a profoundly negative impact on and within Kosovo's civil society. Kosovar negativity toward the process had been earned.

Petar Miletić explained that the fate of Kosovo's Serbs was decided from the outside, between Belgrade and Prishtina, and that recently organized local elections were not in reality "local elections" at all, but a plebiscite on the dialogue. He noted that Serbs and Albanians today live much more peacefully next to each other than they did 3-4 years ago. Regarding the Association of Serb Municipalities, Miletić noted that a key challenge would be how to make the ZSO function; no answers to that question had been elaborated thus far. Another open question was the cooperation of Serb municipalities with the central government in Prishtina. He warned that the Government of Kosovo budget money foreseen for the north would only cover basic costs like salaries, not health care and other services.

Miletić raised the issue of the rationalization of northern Kosovo's public sector. He warned that should this be cut suddenly, new barricades would be erected. He listed the most important parallel institutions that needed to be transformed – health care, education and the Serbian postal service. He also referred to the ongoing discussion over the future of EULEX, expressing the view that EULEX remained essential throughout Kosovo. Closure in 2014 would be disastrous.

Ilir Deda stated that EULEX would not leave and that the Head of Mission, the German diplomat Bernd Borchert, had introduced a new dynamic. A new political era had begun with the outcome of the local elections he believed, which would ultimately lead to the end of the ruling coalition in Prishtina.

Deda expressed his opinion that elections scheduled for 2014 in the EU and Kosovo would force the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue to be placed on hold. 2014 be a lost year. He drew attention to a recent statement by the US diplomat Jonathan Moore who had stated that the ZSO is not an NGO, as Kosovo government officials insist. He warned that agreements reached in the technical dialogue led by EU diplomat Robert Cooper were set to expire in 2015 and 2016. These deals would need to be renegotiated between the EU and incoming Kosovo government. Because of the continued refusal of five EU members to recognize Kosovo, Deda insisted Kosovo had no real EU membership perspective. Its fate depended on Serbia's accession process.

Nenad Đurđević noted that the public discourse in Serbia suggested that the country would do everything to implement the April agreement, though its actual performance deviated substantially from that narrative. He stated that the non-transparent character of the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue had been tolerated by the EU.

Đurđević reported on public opinion research the Forum had recently conducted in northern Kosovo which revealed that only one out of ten citizens had actually read the April agreement. He opined that Serbia's activities in the dialogue in 2013 had been largely determined by Germany and the initiative of Bundestag MPs. He added that ambiguities contained in the April agreement and implementation plan had also had some had

constructive effects, but stressed that securing the functionality of the Kosovo state was critical.

Predrag Simić commented that Kosovo remained unfinished business for Serbia and the EU. He warned that the German-British proposal for the accession framework would ultimately lead to mutual recognition between Serbia and Kosovo.

In the subsequent discussion with the audience, German Green MP Marieluise Beck referred back to Ilir Deda and stressed that the EU must clarify Kosovo's EU perspective. She asked how it was possible that the EU cannot find an agreement on Kosovo. She noted that one of the consequences of the Union's disunity was the hybrid legal framework of EULEX which she labeled "ridiculous." Beck remarked that we have to accept uncertainties and that the world is not ideal.

Engjellushe Morina criticized the attitudes of Western diplomats towards Kosovo's civil society. She reported that civil society representatives had been called by a Quint ambassador and told not to criticize the Kosovo government on the dialogue with Serbia.

Nenad Đurđević stated that civil society had a limited role in decision making and that the international community in general had no interest in financing NGOs that criticize Western policy.

Ilir Deda added that the political dialogue presented a setback for civil society which had long been the lead advocate of normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia – well before the launch of the dialogue.

Deda explained that citizens in Kosovo do not want KFOR or EULEX to leave.

Petar Miletić referred back to earlier discussions on the Association of Serb Municipalities. He expressed his view that the ZSO will neither be a new Republika Srpska in the Balkans nor a mere NGO as Prishtina insists.

He returned to the theme of public sector employment in Serb majority municipalities. He stated that the Kosovo government currently does not have the capacity to handle masses of people that would lose jobs with the end of parallel structures. He criticized representatives of Serbia's Office for Kosovo and Metohija headed by Aleksandar Vulin, for giving Serbs false hopes ahead of the local elections that "nobody will lose his job." This promise cannot possibly be fulfilled.

III. Conclusions

The organizers delivered some closing remarks to conclude the conference. Andreas Poltermann concluded that Kosovo's EU perspective would remain dependant on Serbia's future European path. He insisted that therefore symmetry of Serbia's and Kosovo's EU integration process was thus needed. He stressed the need for the monitoring of the dialogue process, particularly by civil society. Aleksandra Joksimović added that great attention should be paid to public perceptions of the EU integration process in Serbia.

Since the roundtable, there have been several developments in relation to the dialogue and the April agreement implementation which supports the conclusion by most participants that progress is far from assured: At the dialogue round on December 13, the parties failed to reach an agreement on the judiciary. A week later, the EU Council nevertheless decided to open accession negotiations with Serbia on January 21, 2014 – a move which angered the Kosovo government. The convening of municipal assemblies and the assumption of office by newly elected mayors in the north proved difficult. The elected mayor of northern Mitrovica, Krstimir Pantić, stepped down. This will lead to a repetition of mayoral elections in Mitrovica and further delays in establishing the Association of Municipalities. The announcement of early elections in Serbia by the SNS calls the continuation of the dialogue and certainly its tempo, into question.

This highlights the importance of broadening the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue as accomplished with the conference.