

## SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

Are Belgrade and Priština at the beginning of April going to make an agreement about the normalisation of relations which would open the door to Serbia to receive the date of the beginning of negotiations about joining the European Union – is the question that momentarily nobody can give the answer to. It is known, however, that the result of this round of negotiations is going to be the breaking point beyond which Belgrade and Priština will either make a final agreement or the normalisation is going to be fulfilled differently, under the changed conditions, with other politicians and in some other time.

There is no doubt that Belgrade accepted quite difficultly the fact that at the last round of March negotiations Brussels did not offer as the starting document a compromising solution that would enable the Government of Ivica Dačić to bring the negotiations to an end successfully. Instead of the compromise, which was expected by Serbian Government, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton offered a document in which were predicted the basic and additional jurisdictions for the Community of Serbian Municipalities ( in further text the Community ) which was published a few days later by a respectable Belgrady daily press „Politika“. Serbian Government went furious when it realised that the jurisdictions offered to the Community were exactly the same jurisdictions that Municipalities with Serbian majority already had according to the plan of the former Finland President Martti Ahtisaari , which is the base for Kosovo's Constitution and laws by which are given additional rights to Serbian community ( Martti Ahtisaari Plan, Anex III- decentralisation, acts 3 and 5)!? That is why the Government in Belgrade immediately after finishing the seventh round of negotiations, called the meeting which has got a special symbolism. Since Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić straight from Brussels flew to New York to the Meeting of the United Nations Security Council about Kosovo, the meeting of Serbian Government was led by the First Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of the strongest party in Serbia Aleksandar Vučić. Addressing to the Ministers, Vučić said that „ Serbia in Brussels was not given a single percentage of chance to accept the paper that had been offered.“ Vučić added that „ nobody except Serbia showed the readiness to make any kind of cessions or compromises“, and stressed that he promised that the country despite everything „ continue to follow European way“. That Serbian Government still believes in compromise is confirmed by Vučić's words that „ eleven days of hell have been left for the Government as well as for Serbia , but there are some things that we can not accept , but also the things we must not refuse.“ By the statement of the First Deputy Prime Minister Vučić as well as by the appearance of the Prime Minister Dačić in Brussels and New York, Serbian Government wanted to show to the world that even the strongest parties of leading coalition have got the identical policy concerning Kosovo.

However, the negotiations that were finished late at night on March 20th, were quite dramatic because at one moment they were presented both by the European Union Representative Catherine Ashton and the USA as the last negotiations, as well as that it was expected the agreement to be made no matter how high the price would have been. Exactly because of that, during that night the contacts between the First Deputy Prime Minister Vučić and the Prime Minister Dačić were quite intensive because the representatives of Serbia were not satisfied by the content of the paper that the European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton offered as the final suggestion. Serbian Government refused to accept the offer and the fact that the European Union appointed new negotiations on April 2nd shows that Belgrade was right when it evaluated that the negotiations were not going to be ended on March 20th.

Serbian Government is quite furious, no matter how successfully it was hiding it, because it did some seven miles long steps in negotiations with Priština in comparison to the previous Serbian administrations. It is different from its forerunners in two key points. The President Tomislav Nikolić, Prime Minister Dačić and the First Deputy Prime Minister Vučić sincerely wish to finally solve the relations of Belgrade and Priština by the historical compromise of two nations. Their advantage lies in the fact that besides their wish they have political strength and authority to provide such an agreement. It is such a pity that Serbia had not been solving the question of Kosovo in this way earlier as well as that it missed a chance to talk about this problem back in the year 2002. as it wanted then current Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić. Serbia then could have got much more. To be honest, previous governments too, were solving the problem of Kosovo. The problem lied in the fact that they were talking one thing and were doing another, because different politics were held from Belgrade, ( the example of former President of Serbia Boris Tadić and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremić) and in the fact that they were not capable of executing in the practice things they were promising. Current Government in Belgrade, among other things, pays the price of the lack of trust of the international community towards Serbia exactly because of such a politics of previous governments that have lost all credibility. It is the reason why Vučić and Dačić have decided first to pass the agreements and normalisation of relations with Priština that previous government agreed and never implemented on the ground. This way they wanted to send clear message to the international community that Serbia is now governed by the politicians who execute what has been agreed. And they have managed to certain extent because it is obvious the change in politics of Germany towards Serbia, which has obviously understood the process happening in Belgrade. Still, there is an impression that the other parts of international community, especially the USA, have not understood the changes and what kind of opportunity for the permanent solution of the problem offers the Government that was elected in mid-2012 in Belgrade.

Negotiations led by the Prime Ministers Ivica Dačić and Hashim Tachi are really „ So near and yet so far“ from the final solution as poetically spoke Serbian Prime Minister at the mutual press conference for the press in Brussels after the marathon seventh round of negotiations. That mutual press conference of Serbian and Kosovo Prime Ministers as well as shaking hands a few days earlier in Vatican between Serbian President Nikolić and Kosovo Prime Minister Tachi show that Belgrade and Priština are moving towards normalisation of the relations despite the obstacles.

At the mutual appearance in front of the press in Brussels both Prime Ministers were optimistic concerning the making of an agreement despite the differences that have not been overcome. The existence of the positive movements in the relations between Belgrade and Priština was confirmed by the words of Kosovo's Prime Minister Tachi in Brussels that in the last six months „ there has been achieved significant success, unimaginable only a year ago“.

Being so, why the agreement has not been made yet? Maybe it was best explained by the Serbian Prime Minister Dačić in words that the international community forces both Serbian and Kosovo's side to find the solution alone themselves and make a compromise, and it is very difficult because at the Balkans people are not familiar with compromises. This sentence means in fact that there is no pressure of the international community on Kosovo's side to make a compromise. It is the moment when we come to the crucial problem. The fact is that both sides agreed about many concrete problems but still there is no an agreement on the crucial problem. Belgrade asks that the rights for Serbian community on Kosovo should be bigger that it got it through the plan of Martti Ahtisaari on which are based the Constitution of Kosovo and other laws. Priština and one part of the international community , above all the USA, consider that all solutions that should be agreed on, must be in accordance to the laws and the Constitution of Kosovo, meaning the Ahtisaari's plan.

Being so was revealed when the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Katherine Ashton offered a suggestion to the both Albanian and Serbian delegations in which to Serbian Community were given the authorities which municipalities with majority of Serbian citizens had already been given according to the plan of Ahtisaari. That is why Belgrade is asking itself with full right why taking part in negotiations at all if Serbia was not offered anything new in comparison to what Kosovo offered a long time ago to Serbian Community under a pressure of the international community. Simply, Serbia does not need negotiations to accept the Ahtisaari's plan or to admit the independence of Kosovo. Serbia can do it all alone and the fact that it has not done it yet so far shows that there must be a problem, meaning that negotiations are necessary in order to solve them.

So , the basic problem is whether the international community is going to put a pressure on Kosovo's Government to offer to Serbian Community additional cessions which were not predicted so far by Kosovo's laws? If it is to happen, all other problems that emerge in negotiations such as the question of direct elections for the Parliament of the future Community, police and judiciary can be solved. The leaders of Kosovo so far have not shown any kind of wish to make any cessions out of their Constitution, because for that attitude they have got the support of above all the USA. Not being so, they would be forced to speak independently with Serbian Community and seek for the solutions. Compromise would be hard close then because at least it is clear to the leaders of Kosovo's Albanians what it means when the part of the citizens do not admit the state they live in. Exactly they were struggling for the independence from Serbia in the last ten years of the twentieth century by not admitting Serbia, its state bodies, by not taking part in political life and by building parallel institutions. Then it is not going to be difficult for them to understand the fears of Serbs on Kosovo who simply do not trust Priština's institutions.

In that situation it is obvious that as majority nation they have obligation to do much more and to convince Serbs that they want mutual life and not ethnically clear Kosovo, despite what it is written in Kosovo's Constitution, Ahtisaari's plan and laws which formally guarantee additional , really great, rights to Serbian Community.

So , the key for the agreement on Kosovo is not in the hands of Serbs and Albanians but in the fact that, first of all the USA, should stop being slaves to stereotypes when it comes to the question of Kosovo. And the stereotype is that Serbia is going to, sooner or later, accept Kosovo's independence in the current structure, that it is going to do it due to further progress in the process of European integrations and that everyone should only be persistent and restrictive towards Belgrade. By that attitude, Serbia is left without any possibility to make an agreement but only to admit the capitulation and maybe negotiate about the terms of that act. Whether there is going to come to the change of the attitude , above all in Washington, depends mostly on whether it is going to be understood that the political will and authority that current Serbian Government posses concerning Kosovo is the greatest chance for the agreement. Naturally, it means that Serbian Government after successful mission in Berlin should pay more attention to Washington in the following period.

The problem of Serbia is that it is running out of time because every day of not solving the problem of Kosovo cost a high price. Still, Belgrade is not without any arguments. Its strongest card is the fact that Kosovo without any agreement with Serbia should never become a state no metter if it was admitted by 100 or 150 countries. Up until then, Kosovo is going to remain an unfinished country, with part of its citizens who do not admit it, and with the biggest neighbour sharing mutual history which does not admit Priština. Until being so, there is no permanent stability on the Western Balkans. Another Serbian argument is tha fact that if country does not receive a date of the beginning of negotiations, the Government could announce that European Integrations were no longer its priority. In that case, Brussels would be left without any means of pressure towards Belgrade. All of that could lead to the situation where Kosovo would become a frozen conflict such as in the case of Cyprus. And directly to the growing of the influence of Russia on Serbia which is strongly opposed by Brussels.

And we come to the fact that the solution of this conflict is still in the hands of the European Union. Because permanent and final solution of Serbian- Albanian conflict is obviously not possible until the European Union does not accept that Kosovo's problem is European question with the consequences on European security. It implies that someone, probably in Berlin, should explain to Priština to seek for the advice in Brussels because Kosovo is acquiring the candidacy for the member of the European Union and not for a new State in the USA. Right because on that depends the success of negotiations which are led by Dačić and Tachi because the historical compromise of Serbs and Albanians is possible only if both sides lose something out of what they consider to be theirs, and all for the mutual life, regional stability and mutual European future.

Serbian Government showed quite clearly that it was ready for compromise and painful cessions. It remains that someone explains to Kosovo's government that compromises are necessary and that it can not all be left as it used to be on February 17th 2008. when in Priština was proclaimed the independence. Simply, life has shown that some of the solutions from Martti Ahtisaari's plan are not sustainable, or simply are not enough. The stake is big, and it is not only a question of co-life of Serbs and Albanians and historical agreement but also the security of the whole Western Balkans. As well as the fact that it is going to pass a long time until a new chance for permanent peace at the Balkans emerges, if this one is not going to be used.