



BALKANS & EASTERN EUROPE April 2018

Another controversy blocks the Serbian debate on Kosovo

Marko Djuric, head of Belgrade's office for Kosovo and Metohija (KIM), was seized on the 26th of March in the town of North Mitrovica by balaclava-clad and rifle-wielding members of Pristina's Special Operation Unit (SOU) of the Kosovo Police, who fired what appeared to be stun grenades to clear a crowd of angry Serb civilians. Inside the building, people ducked for cover as the police entered the hall where Djuric was speaking and led him away. After the arrest, Djuric was brought to Pristina. After being held for around an hour, he was deported back to Serbia [Andrew MacDowall, Kosovo detains Serbian politician after 'illegal entry' into region, *The Guardian*, 26/03/2018].

He was arrested after entering the country without an official permit, according to the Kosovo government, while Vucic reiterated that Marko Djuric did not go irregularly to Kosovo as he had announced his visit 75 hours earlier (much more than the 24 hours set by the 2016 agreements). The arrest of the head of the Office for Kosovo sparked tension between Pristina and Belgrade and has slightly increased instability in the region.

This episode risks stopping again a significant aspect of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Indeed the Serb List (Srpska Lista), the main political party representing the Kosovo Serbs, does not agree with the government of Kosovo's initiative to start the procedures for the creation of the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities (A/CSM also named ZSO), while stressing that this association should be established based on the agreements reached in the talks between Kosovo and Serbia in Brussels. "Pristina does not have a genuine will to implement these agreements in full or to form the Association of Serb Municipalities. These activities are a clear attempt to decrease international pressure, without a will to implement the agreements", this party declared in a press release.

Marko Djuric has declared that Serbia supports the efforts being made to form the ZSO, but he added that this association will not be established based on the ruling of the Kosovo Constitutional Court, which had struck out 22 of the 23 elements making up the process for the establishment of this association.

The European Union welcomed the decision of President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci and PM Ramush Haradinaj to appoint a team which would draft the association's statute. The spokesperson of the EU High Representative, Maja Kocijancic, said that the drafting of the statute will be finalized within a period of four months. The agreement for the establishment of the A/CSM is part of the agreements reached in April 2013 in the talks for the normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia, brokered by the EU.

The main contention bone are the executive powers of the ZSO: Belgrade wants them (featuring a chairman, vice chairman, assembly, council, logo, flag and a wide range of responsibilities, like decisions on healthcare, education, urban planning and economic development, including tax free Serbian funding), Pristina evidently does not [Muhamer Pajaziti, Kosovo: Serb List is against the government's initiative for the creation of the Association of Serb Municipalities, Independent Balkan News Agency, 06/04/2018]. Compromise is a necessity and institutional integrity goes hand in hand with meaningful minority protection and autonomy.

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