

# JOINT DISCUSSION SUMMARY ON POSSIBLE STEPS FOR NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS

November 14, 2023, Solothurn, Switzerland

## IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREEMENTS

1. **Parties should view the normalization of relations as a significant step and opportunity to advance their EU integration process aiming to conclude it by 2030.** The participants agree that the normalization of relations is linked to the EU integration process.
2. **Parties could take ‘unilateral’ and ‘unconditional’ positive steps.** A participant offered as examples that Kosovo implements the 2016 Constitutional Court decision on the Decani Monastery property; Serbia does not obstruct Kosovo’s membership in the Council of Europe.
3. **Kosovo authorities and Serbs in Kosovo should build a working and trustful relationship and address some of the pressing issues.** Some suggested examples were resolving the electricity issue in the north and the issuance of driver licenses for Serbs in the north who mostly have Serbian driver licenses.
4. **Parties should modify the tone and approach in the bargaining and negotiating process.** Parties should respond to each other’s positive steps with positive steps, minimize the rhetoric that characterizes the other side as the losing side when concessions are made, understand that some steps may be symbolic for one party but difficult decisions for the other side, the parties should establish a hotline communication channel.

## REINTEGRATION OF SERBS IN THE NORTH

1. **Reintegration of Serbs in the north into police and justice system.** There is consensus on the reintegration of the police officers and judges but participants offered different models for reintegration. Some suggested the reintegration should be based on the 2013 Brussels Agreement whereby all police officers and judges reintegrate at the same time. Others favored a new recruitment process whereby the candidates would be subject to vetting.
2. **Local elections in the north.** The participants had consensus on organizing a new local election in the north but suggested different models. Some suggested that the mayors and assembly members resign so as to open the way for the elections. Other participants proposed a recall process whereby the current mayors are removed from office through a recall petition followed by a recall election. Some suggested the parties should discuss an agreement to ensure participation in the election.
3. **Kosovo’s government endorses the statute of the Association/Community.** Participants had no consensus on this step, many arguing this is an issue to be decided by higher leaderships. The participants agreed that if the leaders endorse the statute, then it should be reviewed by Kosovo’s Constitutional Court.
4. **Kosovo adopts an amnesty for the Serbs in the north.** The suggested amnesty would include only those residents who live in the north and who took part in protests and demonstrations so as to remove the fear from arrest. The amnesty would not apply to those engaged in crimes. There was no consensus on this suggestion.
5. **Kosovo’s special police units withdraw from the north as Serb police officers reintegrate.** There was agreement that the special units can withdraw when the security situation stabilized but disagreed on the timing.

6. **All parties ensure the free flow of goods in the north, including suspension of the ban on Serbian goods.** Participants supported in principle the free flow of goods but had no consensus on removing the ban on Serbian goods.
7. **Establishing the Association/Community.** Many suggested the establishment of the Association/Community should come after a new local election in the north. There was no consensus on the value and need of the Association/Community. Some participants argued that the Association/Community is essential in ‘legalizing’ Serb education and healthcare and ensuring the services currently provided by Serbian ‘parallel’ institutions, such as pensions, do not get disrupted. Some other participants believe these services could be offered by the municipalities. Participants agreed that this is an issue to be decided by top leaderships. If the top leaderships agree to form it, the participants said the agreement should be implemented.

#### **OTHER (non-political) North reintegration elements**

1. Kosovo together with EU prepares an economic development plan for the north.
2. Increase Serbian language programs in public universities in Kosovo.
3. Offer joint vocational education and specialty training for the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo.
4. Develop programs to address and reverse the brain drain in the Serb community.

#### **CHALLENGES/OBSERVATIONS**

1. Evolution from the quarter-century old conflict mode to normal relations appears to be stubborn.
2. Leaders seem to respond positively to EU’s and US’s ‘take it or leave it’ approach (the Ohrid Agreement) but drag the implementation nevertheless.
3. Though many believed the Ohrid Agreement ushered in a ‘new beginning, the underlying hostility in the Kosovo-Serbia relations remains strong and the fundamental dynamic between the two parties has yet to change.
4. The ‘fear of losing’ is preventing parties from taking bold steps. Substituting this ‘fear of losing’ with a “hope of winning” seems challenging.
5. Unpredictability characterizes every agreement and aspect of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The parties seem to have difficulties in implementing what they have already committed.

## **SOLOTHURN GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

(in personal capacities)

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