



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Serbia External Relations briefing:  
The EU integration process and the Kosovo issue  
IIPE**

### **China-CEE Institute**

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin

Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 [office@china-cee.eu](mailto:office@china-cee.eu)

 [china-cee.eu](http://china-cee.eu)

During the reporting period, the EU integration process and the Kosovo issue have continued to be among Serbia's crucial foreign policy developments. At the same time, those two questions have shown deep mutual intertwining and strong influence on domestic political affairs. The key foreign policy events that marked this period have been: a regular quarterly meeting of the UN Security Council dedicated to a situation in Kosovo (07.02.2018), and almost simultaneously released the EU Western Balkans Strategy (06.02.2018). Two events had preceded these documents: a situation in the Assembly of Kosovo regarding an establishment of the Special Chambers, and a murder of the prominent Serb politician in Kosovo, Oliver Ivanovic.

On 22 December 2017, the Kosovo's governing coalition attempted to organize an extraordinary plenary session in the Assembly to abrogate the law on the Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office. This failed since the Assembly could not get a quorum in the Presidency of the Assembly. Basically, at the end of the last year and at the beginning of this, the power structures and the political parties and their leaders in Kosovo tried to revoke the law on the Specialist Chambers set to try the allegations of crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

This attempt was widely condemned by Serbian politicians. At the Security Council meeting, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Ivica Dacic has explained the situation and expressed worries over this development and said that the heinous crimes committed against the Serbs and other non-Albanians in Kosovo must not remain unpunished and cannot be relativized or justified.

In his Report, the UN Secretary-General expresses deep disappointment with the development. U.S. Ambassador Greg Dellaway said on the occasion that any initiative to change the Specialist Chambers Law will have profound negative impact. Head of the EU Office in Pristina, Nataliya Apostolova said that she was shocked by the Kosovo Assembly initiative to revoke or abrogate in any other way the Law on Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's

Office. German Ambassador Christian Heldt warned that the rescission of the decision to establish Specialist Chambers could affect the relations between Kosovo and its friends abroad.

An overall security situation in northern Kosovo, which remained fragile with a number of incidents reported, has been wider deteriorated by an incident with potential implications far beyond northern Kosovo. On 16 January a prominent Kosovo Serb politician and leader of the Civic Initiative Serbia, Democracy, Justice”, Oliver Ivanović, was shot dead by unidentified assailants outside his party’s offices in North Mitrovica.

Political leaders in Belgrade and Pristina, as well as the European Union, OSCE and some Member States also issued statements condemning the murder. The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, convened a special session of the National Security Council, at which he described the murder of Mr. Ivanović as a terrorist attack against Serbs in Kosovo, and demanded that Serbia be directly involved in the investigation of the murder. The Prime Minister of Kosovo also called for an emergency session of the Kosovo Security Council. The murder caused shock and outrage in Kosovo and the broader region and the international community. All parties called for the swift identification of those responsible and their appearance before justice are essential, but there no result to date.

Those developments have been reviewed at the Security Council meeting, as well as overall process of “normalization” of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Namely, during the final months of 2017, there was little formal or substantive interaction between Belgrade and Pristina. However, on 12 January 2018, the Prime Minister of Kosovo appointed his Chief of Staff, Avni Arifi, as the new coordinator to lead the Kosovo delegation to the European Union-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina at the technical level. However, following the murder of Mr. Ivanovic, Marko Djurić announced that his delegation had left the technical dialogue session to return to Serbia. Since then, the EU has been maintaining constant contact with Belgrade and Pristina to ensure a resumption of suspended meetings between technical teams. Serbian

FM Ivica Dacic had announced the dialogue would be continued once information on the assassination was obtained or the case solved.

Among the other important issues discussed at the Security Council meeting, Serbian PM highlighted that an establishment of the Community of Serb municipalities is necessary in order to secure and protect the vital interests and improvement of the daily life of the Serbs in Kosovo. It should be said also that the UNHCR recorded the lowest number of returns of Serbs to Kosovo since 2000.

There are ideas about an extended dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina that would directly involve some big powers. Albanians have urged for the direct USA involvement. On the other hand, Russia is ready to join expanded talks as a mediator if the Serbian authorities, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in the course of a visit to Serbia on February 22, and following the talks with Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic.

Regarding the EU integration process, a new phase of engagement by the European Union in the Western Balkans was announced on February 6. The European Commission adopted a strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans' (Western Balkans Strategy). Some commentators described it as the most ambitious and far-reaching framework for engagement since 2003. It spells out the priorities and areas of joint reinforced cooperation, addressing the specific challenges the Western Balkans face, in particular the need for fundamental reforms and good neighborly relations.

Even though the Strategy identified Serbia and Montenegro as frontrunners for the EU membership (it said that EU entry talks should be "well advanced" by 2025), the only specific demand in the Strategy is for improvement of Belgrade-Pristina relations. The Commission is expecting a legally binding normalization agreement, seeing it as crucial for Serbia and Kosovo to advance on their respective European paths. Given the stage of the Serbian candidacy status, this normalization is a pressing issue for the government. Specifically, before joining

the EU, Serbia will have to conclude and implement a legally binding agreement on normalizing relations with Kosovo. It seems that Serbian public is against the “normalization” if it means Serbian recognition of Kosovo statehood.

Furthermore, according to the Strategy, Belgrade could not be able to continue to pursue such close relations with its traditional ally Russia as it is the case today. Namely, the strategy says that so-called would-be members will have to demonstrate “full alignment” with EU foreign policy.

It should be emphasized an important development before the Strategy was announced. Namely, in new Western Balkans Strategy, The European Commission has downgraded Kosovo's enlargement status following a complaint from separatist-hit Spain. It systematically scrubbed out all language from earlier drafts that had put Kosovo on an equal footing with nations such as Serbia and Montenegro in terms of their EU perspective. The adopted text spoke of a "historic window of opportunity" for "Western Balkan countries", while earlier drafts had spoken of an opportunity for "all six Western Balkan partners". The Strategy said Kosovo could "advance on its European path once objective circumstances allow", referring to the fact that Spain and four other EU members do not recognize its independence from Serbia.

The drafts had also said that if Serbia and Kosovo normalized relations, then it would be "a key element on both Serbia and Kosovo's EU path" and that this should happen "by the end of 2019 at the latest". But adopted paper said a Serbia-Kosovo deal would see them "advance on their respective European paths" and dropped the 2019 deadline. The Commission changes came after Spain objected to Kosovo's full inclusion in the strategy.

Spanish complaint refers to the concept of 'WB6' [Western Balkans 6] which “does not fit the enlargement dynamic”. Kosovo is not part of the enlargement process and has its own differentiated framework, Madrid said in an informal paper (non-paper), in the wake of Spain's own separatist crisis in the Catalonia region. Greece, which also does not recognize Kosovo, backed Spain. Of the other EU non-recognizers, Slovakia backed the Commission, while

Cyprus and Romania declined to take a public position. EU foreign relations chief Federica Mogherini said she still hoped the Serbia-Kosovo normalization deal could be concluded by 2019.

Those developments show that the issue of Kosovo and the Serbian European integration are deeply intertwined, despite the public statements made by Serbian officials so far. Spain's action is important because it has showed that each individual EU member state could influence the process of integration in the name of its own interests.

Finally, it should be said that on February 17, Kosovo celebrated 10 years of unilaterally declared independence. On the same day, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic brought from Burundi a note on withdrawal of earlier Kosovo recognition. That once again reminds us that the process of Kosovo state building is not irreversible. So far, over 100 countries have recognized Kosovo, but Russia and China, as permanent members of the Security Council, do not recognize them. Kosovo has not become a member of the most important international organizations - the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe. Kosovo is still in a legal limbo, and its future will be largely conditioned by the Serbian European interactions and the wider international processes.