



Weekly Briefing

**Serbia Political briefing:
Kosovo - never-ending story
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

 china-cee.eu

Kosovo - never-ending story

***Abstract:** The most important political events in June were: a stalemate in the negotiations with Prishtina, the Venice Commission's opinion on constitutional amendments, resuming work on formulation a new Media Strategy, the takeover of the Airport Constantine the Great in Niš by the state. Activities within the process of Eurointegration take place on a regular basis.*

***Key words:** Kosovo, Constitution, justice, Media Strategy, Airport in Niš*

The fate of the agreement between Belgrade and Prishtina at the end of June is still uncertain. At the beginning of the month, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić announced that the agreement would be the object of declaring the people, although he did not specify what type of voting would be. Since the negotiations of two sides remain without a visible solution, and the events in the field further diminish its achievement, there is nothing of its adoption for now. The positions of two negotiating sides are opposed: the Serbian side insists on formation of the Community of Serb Municipalities, while the Albanian believes that this must be in accordance with the Kosovo Constitution; furthermore, Kosovo negotiators are seeking to negotiate first on the energy sector, etc. In the end, the document of Task Force for drafting of Statute of the Community of Serb Municipalities was returned because it was written in Cyrillic script (not in three languages, as requested by the Kosovo Government); Serbian Minister of Defense Vulin is banned from entering Kosovo's territory to celebrate the Serbian holiday Vidovdan on June 28th. At the Gazimestan location in Kosovo Field (a place where the Kosovo battle between the Serbs and the Turks took place on June 28, 1389), a smaller number of Serbs gathered than expected, and the whole celebration was without incidents. The Kosovo Security Force has made an effort not to have any

incidents in Kosovo that day. Expectedly, several Serbian bishops at Gazimestan on that occasion expressed their disagreement with the current policies of President Vučić and the Serbian Government regarding Kosovo. They see this policy and possible agreement as a betrayal of Serbian national interests.

The optimism in the Serbian Progressive Party that we saw during the formation of the Serbian List in Kosovo under its influence slowly disappeared. President Vučić has on several occasions announced that he does not expect any good solution, but more reduction of harmful effects. It is noticeable that Kosovo negotiators appear more calmer and gradually round their position. Apparently they believe in the support of their allies. In his interview in April this year, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj clearly stated that Kosovo does not have its own foreign policy, but belongs to the US-led club. In addition to the fact that most of the European Union member states have recognized Kosovo's independence, while Serbia is under constant pressure on conditionality in the process of Eurointegration, it is not difficult to agree with President Vučić opinion.

On June 22, 2018, the Venice Commission unanimously adopted an opinion on the Draft Amendments to the Serbian Constitution in the field of Justice. In this opinion, the Venice Commission made six remarks on the solutions that should be corrected. The Commission recommended a correction of the amendments relating to the following: 1. the selection of non-judicial members of the High Judicial Council; 2. the composition of the State Prosecutorial Council; 3. the method of dissolution the High Judicial Council; 4. dismissal of judges and prosecutors due to incompetence; 5. unification of case law; 6. selection of prosecutors. The remarks of the Venice Commission largely coincide with the remarks made by legal associations during the public hearing, and they sought a new public debate before the recommended corrections to the amendments. They suggest that work on the formulation of amendments should begin again, so that they will be in line with European legal standards. For its part, the Ministry of Justice is pleased with the Venice Commission's opinion,

state that all remarks will be included in the final text of the Draft Constitutional Amendments, and this harmonized text will be made available to the public on the Ministry's website, and will be submitted to the Serbian Government. So there will be no new public debate. Reactions of Associations of Judges, legal associations and legal experts to this attitude of the Ministry of Justice are negative.

Let's mention two news in the field of justice that we can boast of. The second amendment to the Law on Enforcement and Security was announced after seven years of its implementation in practice. The reason is frequent self-will of private executors, unfair implementation of laws and uneven practice. The aim of the announced amendments is higher judicial control over the work of private executors. Another good news is that from July 1st the registration of real estate in the cadastre will be carried out by notaries ex officio, which does not eliminate the possibility of doing the same to the citizens themselves if they want to. In any case, the process of registering real estate in the cadastre should be simplified and speeded up.

At the end of June, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States adopted a resolution on the murder of the Bitići brothers in Serbia in 1999. Since they are US citizens, the Serbian judiciary should bear in mind that the United States will not forget this and that the case has to be resolved.

The Media Strategy (Draft Strategy for the Development of Public Information until 2023) Saga continues from the autumn of last year. The Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and the President Vučić temporarily suspended further work on April 23, 2018. To say that this Draft was never presented to the public. On June 18, 2018, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić formed a Task Force for the Media Strategy. The Task Force consists of 9 representatives of media and journalistic associations and 8 representatives of the state. The new Media Strategy will be developed with the support of the OSCE and the European Union Delegation to Serbia. Since the work to date on the formulation of a new

Media Strategy has been burdened with conflicts between Government representatives and journalists and media associations, it can be expected that this cooperation will not be easy in the future. Journalists and media associations insist on solving two problems: the safety of journalists and the discrimination of media that are not close to the authorities.

Almost all of June was marked by a strange affair concerning the disappearance and the finding of a journalist from Bela Crkva Stefan Cvetković. Allegedly, he dealt with the murder of Oliver Ivanović, but his recent testimony in Priština brought nothing new. It is not even clear today what is really about, but the government and media associations have used the case for their propaganda. The question remains who needed it?

The Serbian Government successfully completed the takeover of the Niš airport in a way that the Assembly of the City of Niš decided to transfer the Airport Constantine the Great in Niš to the state of Serbia. A monthly campaign and pressure on local politicians on the one hand, the protests of the city's population, on the other, as well as numerous criticisms of this Government's intention, only heightened the suspicion in most of the public about the arguments put forward by the Government. Whether this decision will contribute to the development of Niš region or profits of French company Vinci (concessionaire of Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade), remains to be seen.

The Serbian Progressive Party formed an old-new city government in Belgrade by proposing and electing for the mayor prof. Zoran Radojičić, director of the University Children's Clinic in Belgrade. City manager remains Goran Vesić. Such a constellation of political forces and the division of power in the state and City of Belgrade ensures better cooperation on the line state-City of Belgrade and reduces the possibility of conflict.

Five months ago, the Anti-Corruption Agency launched an initiative to replace the Rector of the University of Kragujevac prof. Nebojsa Arsenijević for conflict of interest. Despite the resistance to this initiative at the University itself, the Ministry of Education has completed this process by electing a new Acting

Rector prof. Nenad Filipović for a period of 6 months. It is certain that the Anti-Corruption Agency had good reasons for launching its own initiative, but it is not good that the state violates the autonomy of the University.

After 15 years of renovation, the National Museum in Belgrade was re-opened on June 28, 2018, so the permanent museum exhibition is accessible to the public. Otherwise, the National Museum was founded in 1844 and the present building (built in 1903) was assigned to use in 1950.

Conclusion

June did not bring about significant changes in the political scene of Serbia, and the events took place with the expected flow. The ruling Serbian Progressive Party consolidates its position in all areas where it is possible, while in relations with Prishtina and abroad, the Government's activities align with possible solutions. The question is, would something more significant be different that some of the opposition parties are in power? However, many strategic issues of country and society development remain unresolved, or are resolved with half-success. Difficulties in solving political problems hid numerous positive developments and activities of the Government in the fields of economy, culture, education, tourism, etc.