

## - Direct Belgrade-Pristina talks in sight

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(B92/RTS/Beta/AP) - The first round of new negotiations on Kosovo's status was completed in Vienna. According to the Serbian electronic media, both delegations and the international mediators are quite happy with the start, which were held in "a constructive and cordial atmosphere." RTS reported that the Serbian delegation insisted on status related issues, while the Pristina team insisted on the technical ones.

Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic said agreement was reached for Belgrade and Pristina to start direct Kosovo talks soon. Jeremic explained that the direct negotiations on Kosovo's future status should start as soon as possible, on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, scheduled for late September.

"From the outset of the new round of talks, Belgrade has been insisting on starting direct negotiations with Pristina as soon as possible," he told reporters after the meeting between the Belgrade delegation and the Troika in Vienna. "What is important is that Belgrade, Pristina and the Troika all agreed that there must be absolute commitment to peace and that threats of violence are unacceptable," he said. "A delicate phase is starting in which efforts will be made to reach a compromise that would secure a peaceful and stable future for Western Balkans." Violence and threats of violence are not conducive to that goal," said Jeremi, who co-chairs the Belgrade delegation.

The other co-chairman, Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic, said that the Belgrade delegation had presented Serbia's vision of the future status of Kosovo to the mediating Troika. The Belgrade delegation presented a complex idea whose goal is to resolve the problem, he said. According to this plan, Kosovo would have more prerogatives than ever before, more than it had in the former Yugoslavia, during the rule of Slobodan Milosevic or under the existing Constitutional Framework, Samardzic emphasized. The Belgrade team tried to acquaint the Troika with this idea and expressed Serbia's commitment to keep the proposal open for discussion, not in a "take it or leave it" form, but in a way to get the other party to take part in negotiations in the second phase of the talks, he said.

Samardzic expressed hope that the two principles Belgrade has proposed to the Troika will be accepted - direct talks with Pristina and discussing status rather than other issues. Nevertheless, they are important too, Samardzic said, naming protection of cultural and religious monuments as an example.

The EU representative in the mediating Troika Wolfgang Ischinger said at a news conference following the talks that the meetings offered an opportunity for the two sides to reveal their proposals for the solution to the future Kosovo status. He added the Troika planned to pursue "a dynamic schedule" as talks continue in September. Ischinger hinted at the possibility that representatives of the Serbian government and ethnic Kosovo Albanian officials might meet during the UN General Assembly session in New York late next month.

Ischinger also said that Kosovo's partition was not on the table today, adding it will not be considered in the future either. "The question of partition, which generated media interest, has never been on the agenda of the Troika or raised by either party," he said, and added that the mediators remained dedicated to the Contact Group principles which reject the division of Kosovo.

The Russian member of Troika, Aleksandar Botsan-Kharchenko told journalists that "no great progress can be expected from the discussions", but that the meetings were only a start of the process, where the Troika will work to find a compromise.

Spokesman for the Pristina negotiating team Skender Hyseni said following the talks that Pristina had presented its vision of future relations with Serbia, as "equal, independent nations." "The Kosovo team reiterated its position that there can be no negotiations over the Ahtisaari package. We were also glad to hear the Troika repeating one of the Contact Group's fundamental principles, that is, the territorial integrity of Kosovo," Hyseni told reporters in Vienna.

Pristina negotiating team member Veton Surroi announced that the Kosovo Albanians were prepared to negotiate with Belgrade any time and anywhere, although they felt that Kosovo's status should be resolved by December 10. "The possibility of partition has been dismissed, and neither side wants to talk about it. We understand the detrimental consequences this would have, not just for us but for regional stability."

Kosovo's prime minister vowed to declare independence unilaterally if internationally brokered talks don't "open a way for us". Agim Ceku told The Associated Press: "No more delay. We cannot afford further uncertainty. We need a decision." Ceku said he would press for the talks to "open a way for us to declare independence." If that doesn't happen, he said, "we have to declare and we are going to ask the international community to recognize us."