

Paris, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

**Note to the attention of Mr Qëndrim Gashi, Ambassador**

**Analysis of Kosovo's road to EU integration**

French media and political leaders' position towards the question of Kosovo as a potential candidate to integrate EU is characterized by a quite relative indifference, little knowledge of the topic, many hostile preconceived ideas, and an unfavorable environment to hear, neither to support, arguments in favor of EU enlargement.

What has been at stake in Kosovo remains largely unknown in Europe and, thus, has not much been taken into consideration by the French government, nor by MFA's cabinet or by his administration. This indifference is not an attempt to hide any particular form of rejection of the issue, but, rather, reveals a weakening of the bilateral relations between France and Kosovo since the independence of the country.

However, peace discussions have raised mediatic and political interest towards this geographical area, even if it has been in a very restricted manner.

In 2018 and 2019, peace agreement between Serbia and Kosovo (implying Kosovo's recognition by Serbia), which is the necessary preamble to further discussions on Kosovo's potential application for European integration, seemed quite easy to reach.

French political leaders and medias have finally seen the urgency to put an end on that frozen conflict, by understanding a schematic equation: Serbia needs pacific relations with his neighbor for the purpose of getting closer to EU. On the contrary, Kosovo needs Serbian recognition in order to integrate several international organizations, diminish an economic and interior situation marked by difficulties (corruption, unemployment) and take position for a future candidature to join EU. One thing was clear: both countries shared a common objective: getting closer to EU.

The reopening of peace discussions has been quickly focused on territorial border modification and has put on the table the debate / taboo on possible reconsideration of Balkans' map, raising surprise, fear, worry on a renewal of Balkan war.

This issue has often been misunderstood and misperceived by French media and politics, seeing a possible reopening of Pandora's box and a high risk of "domino effect" in the region, justifying other neighbors' will to change borders by ethnic lines.

In the first instance, Kosovo's position, showing how territorial modification could, on the contrary, serve relations' pacification and be a way to the resumption of dialogue with Serbia has been inaudible.

Then, USA's official support to that border correction has initiated a significant reversal of tendency, followed by France and EU authorities.

Even if it was a quite "relative support", they considered it as a positive signal in favor of peace, whereas other countries such as Germany have been firmly opposed to that idea, fearing a risk of contagion in the rest of the region.

If a clear disagreement has appeared within European countries, it all has contributed to put an end on a taboo.

Afterwards, a number of symbols have been positively perceived by French media and political leaders: handshaking between President Thaçi and President Poutine at the occasion of the 11/11/2018 peace ceremonies, the interviews of President Thaçi in German and French media in favor of peace have been seen as a true will of reaching peace and the final aim to apply for EU.

However, this febrility and the feeling that peace agreement between both countries was right next door has arisen very quickly. There was not much time. Peace negotiations have benefited from a window of opportunity, before upcoming European elections.

Instead, internal dissensions and oppositions against peace, the lack of support on both sides, and the image of statesmen that are used to fight has put an end on the progress that had been done.

#### **What is France's official position?**

The election of President Macron has aroused a lot of hope within the Balkan countries and their populations. Many believed in his willingness to getting involved in that region. His role as a mediator has been discussed at some point, taking a leadership posture for the conflict resolution.

There have been various opportunities to it: peace ceremonies of 11/11, French-German summit in April 2019, etc...

Instead of it, he recently adopted official posture on EU enlargement: "reform should precede enlargement", underlining the necessity to rethink EU integration and resolve current issues such as migratory crisis before open borders.

This has been reinforced with the fact that President Macron has chosen not to visit Pristina while he was travelling to Belgrade.

Whereas joining EU is at the center of Kosovo's ambition and national strategy, the EU, and more specifically France, is unable to appreciate the geopolitical role and influence that it can play in that region, on the same level as Russia or Turkey or Gulf countries. French political leaders understand Balkan's enlargement more as a risk than as a chance to preserve stability in that region.

**Enlargement and EU integration: a security and migratory issue as seen from**

**France:**

One example to illustrate this is France's position towards visa liberalization for Kosovar citizens.

In France, the question of liberalizing visas is dealt with by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Beauveau) alone. The Ministry of Europe and of Foreign Affairs (Quai d'Orsay) is little if not at all implicated: this cabinet minister is totally disengaged from the matter. Thus, the French Prime Minister takes into account the advice and council of the Minister for Home Affairs, which is not balanced out with any other position from within the Government.

Thus, the visa issue is only considered from a security and migratory perspective: the concern about economic immigration to Europe, and more particularly to France, currently dictates the French political line on the matter. The idea that there is an "Albanian- speaking delinquency" is also taken seriously.

This perspective prevents any global and political understanding of the dossier. It deprives the President of France and his Prime Minister from understanding the political and economic benefits of medium-term integration of Kosovo in Europe.

Up until now, the Quai d'Orsay has abstained from taking a stance on the matter. Thus far, French politics have neglected the value of an economically integrated Kosovo within Europe, as well as the value of developing French companies in Pristina, of offering positives outlets to young Kosovars and, in particular, have neglected the value of a peaceful future between Serbia and Kosovo.

The security and migratory barriers must therefore be overcome by communicating additional messages to Kosovo's audience in France: political decision-makers, shapers of opinion, influential journalists.

It would be a mistake and not very effective to only aim for the President, Emmanuel Macron, considering that he systematically delegates such affairs to his cabinet and administration, who are themselves influenced in this matter by the Ministry of Home Affairs, rather than by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This is why it is essential to raise the awareness among French political leaders as a whole on this matter and on the necessity to engage positively in European integration and the peace process is fundamental.



**Prishtina  
Insight**

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