On 19 April 2013 the prime ministers of Kosovo and Serbia, Hashim Thaci and Ivica Dacic, signed an agreement in the tenth round of negotiations, sponsored by European Union Foreign Policy Chief Baroness Catherine Ashton. The negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia had begun earlier in 2011 on technical issues which had been resolved positively. These included: free trade, recognizing customs stamps, recognizing university degrees, civil registries, freedom of movement, integrated border management, and how Kosovo is to be referred to in international conferences. But the technical issues were dependent on the overall political agreement.

The political negotiations began officially 19 October 2012 when Baroness Ashton invited Prime Minister Thaci and Prime Minister Dacic into her office in Brussels. Neither had met the other before. Thaci had been known for his earlier organizational work for the Kosovo Liberation Army, while Dacic had been Milosevic’s spokesman. It was a political risk for each to be in the company of the other. They met nine more times, sometimes for meetings that lasted as long as 14 hours. The eventual signing by both parties was a clear success for the EU.

Precedent for Conflict Resolution in Pre-Accession Period Serbia knew that unless it could normalize relations with Kosovo, it would not be considered for candidacy. Kosovo sought recognition by certain countries in the EU. Both Slovakia and Romania suggested that if Serbia and Kosovo signed this Agreement, they would consider recognizing Kosovo. Such recognitions, along with movement to Stability and Association status, are important for Kosovo moving toward an eventual EU pathway.

The importance for the EU of this Agreement was stated most clearly by Michael Geary of Maastricht University, scholar of modern Europe and the European Union, who noted that the Agreement of Kosovo and Serbia represents a precedent for conflict resolution in the pre-accession period. As he noted at the Wilson Center, Washington, D.C. (April 24, 2013), in the past the EU inherited conflicts when they took in Cyprus, Ireland, and Spain. The most powerful tool of the EU is enlargement. After a country is part of the EU, it is harder to affect it. Therefore conflict resolution should be insisted on in the pre-accession period, as is being done with Serbia.

Background to Conflict of Serbs in Northern Kosovo

After the 1999 War in Kosovo, many Serbs, especially from the western part of Kosovo where the fighting had been the worst, left with the retreating Serbian military and paramilitary forces.
However Serbs did remain in Kosovo in certain rural areas in the southeast, in several central towns, and in four northern municipalities that were close to Serbia. There was even an attempt to make the northern region all Serb. Albanian villages there were razed, mosques destroyed, and in 2000, eight months after the war had ended, 11,454 Albanians were expelled from this area.

The main city of the north was Mitrovica which before the war had been a place where Serbs and Albanians lived near each other and worked together in the Trepa mines. Yet with the dislocations of the 1990s and the war much had changed. French KFOR allowed Mitrovica to become divided at the Ibar River into a Serbian north and an Albanian south. In 2004, another 300 Albanians were expelled from northern Mitrovica and their homes and apartments given to Serbs. Serbs who had remained in southern Mitrovica were bused by UNMIK to the north at this time. Thus Internationals supported the ethnic cleansing of the area.

There are an estimated 65,000 Serbs in the four municipalities in the north of Kosovo. These include Serbs who have long lived in this area, as well as Serbs who came from cities of western Kosovo, as well as Serbian paramilitaries who settled in northern Mitrovica, and Serbs who were sent by train from the Krahina in Croatia to northern Kosovo in the mid-1990s. The newcomers make peace more difficult since they do not know their Albanian neighbors the way those who used to live near them and work with them did.

Belgrade set up parallel structures that have been especially lucrative for those in the northern municipalities. A certain number of Serbs in the north receive salaries from both Belgrade and Prishtina. Add to this the possibilities for smuggling across a border that is difficult to patrol, and it is clear why there are Serbs in the north who do not want the situation there to change.

At the same time it is important to remember that only one-third of the Serbs of Kosovo live in the municipalities of northern Kosovo. It is these Serbs who have refused to recognize Kosovar sovereignty that was declared in 2008, who have caused the main problems, and who are addressed in the Agreement. Fully two-thirds of the Serbs in Kosovo live in the central or southern part of the country and are more integrated in the society and its governmental structures.

A Fifteen-Point Agreement on Principles

A major point of the Agreement is the elimination of the parallel structures from Belgrade. The salaries of the police (point 7) and the salaries of court personnel (point 10) will come from Prishtina. The parallel structures must end by June 2013.

The first six points have to do with an association of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo. These include the four in the north, but others in the south are free to join. They have full overview of economic development, education, health, and urban and rural planning.

One of the most contentious provisions is the one that allows for a Police Regional Commander for the four northern Serb majority municipalities (point 9). The four mayors will submit a list to the Ministry of the Interior who will choose the Commander from the list. An earlier point (point 7) had stated that there is one integrated police force. The following point (point 8) stated that existing Serbian security (who had worked for five years) would be offered places in the
equivalent Kosovo structures.

The question of whether Kosovo police can patrol the northern region was answered in the negative. KFOR will still be involved. So, are the northern municipalities still part of Kosovo, if their police cannot go there? This is truly a sensitive compromise.

A new element is the way elections are dealt with (point 12). They will be overseen by the OSCE. Will the Serbs in the northern municipalities participate in the elections? Serbs in the other regions do participate in elections.

Energy and telecom issues have not been resolved but need to be by June 15 (point 14). Until now Serbs in the northern municipalities have not paid for electricity or water.

**Implementation**

There will be an implementation committee made up of two sides and facilitated by the EU (point 15). This has already begun since there is understanding among some EU countries is that unless there are clear results of normalization of relations with Kosovo, beyond the signing of the Agreement, Serbia will not be approved for candidacy in June. But Serbia is already saying that it needs much more time to get the Serbs in the north to agree to anything. However only Belgrade can make them acquiesce.

The Kosovar Albanians have moved beyond the Ahtisaari Agreement, an agreement to which they had little input. This accords the Serbs more minority rights than any minority group in Europe.

What is sadly true however is that when Internationals are involved, the result is segregation. That was the result of the Ahtisaari Agreement. That is the result of this Agreement. For real dialogue you have to involve people on the ground. Unfortunately, only Belgrade can force the Serbs in the north to change here. So maybe dialogue is not the answer.

But the situation of the Serbs in the north has been thanks to the Internationals to a certain extent, and to Belgrade. The French allowed the division of the city of Mitrovice after the war, and allowed the expulsion of Albanians in 2000. Then Belgrade funded the parallel structures for fourteen years. Hopefully this is about to change. If it does not, then Serbia should not be accepted for candidacy in the EU in June.

I only hope the EU holds firm. Such firmness is required to guarantee that the success of the remarkable negotiations that it sponsored between Kosovo and Serbia endures.

---

**Frances Trix** is a Wilson Center fellow and a professor of linguistics and anthropology at Indiana University. She was an IREX fellow at the University of Prishtina 1987-1988, speaks Albanian, and continues to carry out research in Kosova.