

****

**NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION**

**STRATEGIC TRENDS**

April 2015

**BALKANS**

**Serbia and Kosovo resume normalisation talks**

About two years ago, precisely on 13th April 2013, Serbian [Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Serbia) [Ivica Dačić](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivica_Da%C4%8Di%C4%87) and Kosovo [Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Kosovo) [Hashim Thaçi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashim_Tha%C3%A7i) signed the 15-point Brussels Agreement (namely the *First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations*), under the supervision of the former [EU High Representative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Representative_of_the_Union_for_Foreign_Affairs_and_Security_Policy) [Catherine Ashton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Ashton)

This Agreement represents a milestone within the normalization process between Serbia and Kosovo which remains, after the 1999 war and the 2004 political turmoil, one of the most crucial and controversial issues concerning contemporary Balkans. Furthermore, the Agreement implies a Serbian diplomatic *de facto* (not by Serbian law) recognition of the 2008 [Kosovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo)'s [declaration of independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Kosovo_declaration_of_independence), which divided the international community between supporters and opponents. The Brussels Agreement is considered by the EU as a crucial step for both Kosovo and Serbia in the view of a future affiliation to the Union and it contains a series of agreements in the fields of justice, law enforcement, administrative organization of Kosovo, elections, energy and communication management.

On 21st April 2015 the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission Federica Mogherini hosted a new meeting regarding the normalization of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The meeting was attended by high level delegates (Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić for Serbia and Prime Minister Isa Mustafa for Kosovo) and was arranged in order to assess the *status* of the implementation of the Brussels Agreement. The negotiations were extensive, as admitted by the same Vučić, however the results were uncertain.

Indeed, even though aspects of the Agreement were successfully achieved (election, communication), the main problem remains unsolved, and it concerns sovereignty. The legal and political status of the Serbian population in Kosovo (90.000-120.000 persons spread among ten enclaves) still presents several undefined aspects. At the moment the Serb population minority and the Albanian population majority are living almost separated, as the city of Mitrovica demonstrates.

Standing to the provisions of the Brussels Agreement, Belgrade would renounce to parts of Serbs’ autonomous prerogatives and claims, in exchange of the formal establishment of the Community of Serbian Municipalities which would be entitled to political, social and economic rights. Until now, this disposition remains only on paper. The legacy of war and mutual hate spread among public opinion in both countries make the implementation of the Agreement considerably difficult, especially in a poor country hit by unemployment and corruption.

Nevertheless, the perspective of regional stabilization and of the admission to the European Union continues to be the main goal of both governments. The European Union, which is the real *deus ex machina* of the Brussels Agreement, has to accept and embrace the responsibility to lead the process. A positive solution of the Kosovo issue would represent a remarkable success for the EU enlargement and foreign affairs policy, especially since it would take place in an area where in the past the EU has experienced some of its most dramatic failures.