

The influence of March 2004 events in the resolution of the final status of Kosovo

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In the paper on March 2004 events, I tried to compare relevant factors such as the lack of a defined final status, economic problems, organized crime and others, and conclude on the extent of the influence of those factors on the final settlement of the Kosovo status.

Introduction

March 2004 events, despite denouncements and public condemnations of such riots, in a temporal prism, have to some extent influenced positively the issue of Kosovo, understanding and enhancing international policy on Kosovo, although violence was not necessary, because it damaged the image and the objective of such protests.

March 2004 riots began with an incident which took place in the city of Mitrovica, which caused a riot of three days, which ultimately displaced the normality of public life of Kosovo's residents.

There were many factors which brought the March events, while the Mitrovica incident was only one spark, because many problems had accumulated demanding solutions: undefined final status, economic problems, unemployment, increasing criminality rates, corruption and other factors of no ethnic difference, which ultimately gained expression in the March 2004 riots.

One must mention another important factor, the communication language between internationals and locals, notably lack of communication between the four pillars of UNMIK, lead by the SRSG.

These events were a challenge for UNMIK, PISG-s, KFOR and the international community, for omissions and weaknesses of this administration demanded correction, and capacity building of all relevant factors was needed.

This was the time when an acceleration of the process aiming for a final status for Kosovo was necessitated. This was the time when the opinion was formed that such a situation and such administration could not continue any further.

These events had countered the thesis that by leaving things as they are for a longer time, something would get better, independently of reality.

For UNMIK, March 2004 riots were a lesson, that building sustainable peace is a rather difficult challenge. This fact was recognized by UNMIK officials, although not publicly.

As a result of March 2004 events, countries of the Contact Group – France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and the United States of America, were compelled to return their attention to Kosovo.

After the March 2004 events, the international community generally began changing its course towards finding a solution for the final status of Kosovo. UN Secretary General appointed the permanent Norwegian Ambassador to NATO, Kai Aide, for his Envoy to evaluate standards set forth by the UN as a condition for initiating the process of resolving the political status of Kosovo.

The Mission of Marc Grossman

March events gave a new thrust to processes of defining a final status for Kosovo. This is also underlined by the statement of the American Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman, which quoted: "Violence which was seen recently between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo is undoubtedly an obstacle to the progress of the country."

These comments were made by the Undersecretary of State during a visit to Prishtina, after talks with the UN SRSG in Kosovo, which was Harri Holkeri at that time. This strong message was repeated also before the leaders of Kosovo, the President and the Prime Minister.

Grossman stated that if progress is desired for Kosovo, it is best to change the path pursued so far, and informed the Kosovar leaders that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo would be presenting a plan for realization of standards for democracy and human rights by the end of that week.

These statements by Grossman, Undersecretary of State, were rather well received by the public, but also the leaders of Kosovo, and were understood that the issue of Kosovo and its status are in a good way towards a permanent and final solution. It is this context in which we must view the March events, because they had a positive influence in enhancing processes of settling a final status for Kosovo.

Mission of Kai Aide

This mission began with the Norwegian Ambassador, Mr. Kai Aide, an envoy of the United Nations Secretary General for evaluation of standards implementation.

The objective of the envoy was to oversee the implementation of standards, for him to prepare a final report, which was ultimately to be submitted to the UN Secretary General.

During his visits to Kosovo, Mr. Aide would persistently demand from the institutions and the opposition to make concrete steps in several fields, reflecting not only the achievement of standards, but also the general situation in Kosovo.

During one of his visits to Kosovo, Mr. Aide had stated his hope “of seeing the Government and the opposition working together constructively, with a view of reaching the condition that we want, i.e. a positive report. This can only be achieved by a joint constructive activity of all of us”.

His mission was to describe in details a general overview of the political situation, meaning that the issue of standards would be addressed, and the progress made in that sense.

The overarching goal was to demand accountability of UN in Kosovo, pursuant to Resolution 1244 (1999), including assistance to the political process aimed at defining the future status of Kosovo.

The review would offer the basis for a political assessment of the UN Secretary General, whether the situation was favourable to initiate the process of resolving the future final status.

A comprehensive review consisted of consultations with stakeholders and main players in the field, and the international community, with a view of assessing the current situation and conditions for future potential steps into the process.

The UN Secretary General Envoy would review the actual political reality and formal conditions for initiating the status process, on grounds of continuous and effective progress in standards implementation.

The Special Envoy would further consult the SRSG, and representatives of Security Council and Contact Group countries, relevant regional organizations, relevant stakeholders and other important players.

One must underline that timelines and pace of reporting were not predetermined. The report aimed at rendering a comprehensive assessment of the political situation, and close surveillance on perspectives of a future status process.

This was aimed at determining whether it was time to begin such a process, a wide assessment of the situation in Kosovo would be made, while demanding progress beyond standards’ implementation. The report would include consi-

derations related to most important developments in Kosovo, the region as such, and be drafted in cooperation with the international presence.

The key issues was to ascertain whether sufficient political maturity and readiness was achieved for the process to begin, or such a decision requires more time.

The Kai Aide report, with its content, was submitted to the UN Secretary General, who afterwards stated to have ordered the initiation of talks for the final status of Kosovo. This seems to be the moment when the status quo, persisting for several years, had begun displacing.

This assumption is also strengthened by statements of American Undersecretary of State, Nicolas Burns, who repeated the stance of the American Administration, that the status quo is not sustainable, and that the time had come for the people of Kosovo to know what is its future. The European Union expressed its own stance as well, which went along the path of initiating negotiations, based on assessment of the Kai Aide report.

It was made clear that key factors of international policy had already unified their stances on initiating negotiations on the final status of Kosovo.

It is worth mentioning that the report and the recommendation of the UN Secretary General, were warmly received in Kosovo, not only by the public but also by politicians, because this approach of international actors served a faster resolution of a final status for Kosovo.

Conclusion:

There were different opinions on March 2004 riots, both inside and outside Kosovo, in many relevant international institutions, but the conclusion may be based on several issues of importance:

1. The situation persisting in Kosovo for many years under the UNMIK administration was unacceptable, considering the undefined status, poor economic development, organized crime, creating a lack of perspective and negative development.

2. It can be fairly stated that despite damages brought about by March 2004 riots, they also had their positive side, because the international community, the Contact Group and USA changed their course of action.

3. In this context, the international community decided that Kosovo institutions would fulfil some of the standards which were important to the lives of citizens in Kosovo, before the settlement of the final status:

- Rule of law,
- Operationalization and efficient institutions,
- Free and uninhibited movement,
- Return and integration in the institutions,
- Economy and revitalization,

Hence, it may be freely stated that March events, despite the whole negative image, had ignited the process of the status for Kosovo, and had placed it in the international agenda, thereby allowing Kosovo Albanians to realize their aspirations for independence.

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