



Statement

of the Helsinki Committee
for Human Rights in Serbia

on the Urgency of
the Intensified Efforts
to Safeguard
the European Principles and Values
in the Process of
the Resolution
of the Kosovo Question

Belgrade, 8 June 2020

ON THE OCCASION OF the EU Summit held in Zagreb on 6 May 2020, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia initiated a petition signed by eighty prominent public figures calling on the participants to support pro-European forces in Serbia, with special attention drawn to the need to address the acute crisis concerning Kosovo.

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia strongly welcomes the EU reaffirmation of its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. We also appreciate the recommitment of the Western Balkan partners to the European perspective as their firm strategic choice. We fully share the Summit's noting that "the credibility of this commitment depends also on clear public communication and the implementation of the necessary reforms".

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In that regard, the HCHR in Serbia wishes to highlight, once again, the vital role of the EU as a guarantor of the preservation of European principles and values in the Western Balkans. For many years, Western Balkan societies have faced the risk posed by attempts to abandon the principles upon which the Balkan architecture has been built. Therefore, we would like to draw – once again – the attention of European governments to the need for unequivocal rejection of the latest attempts in that direction. The active role of the EU in the next phase of the consolidation process of Kosovo will be crucial to ensure peace and stability in the region.

As concerns Kosovo, the EU, together with the United States played a key role process of Kosovo becoming independent. Majority of the EU countries have recognized Kosovo's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its existing borders.

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The US and the EU, particularly Germany and France, have been making efforts to integrate Kosovo and other Balkan countries into the international community of nations, including the membership in the EU and NATO. However, because of geopolitical restructuring and internal policy differences that process is currently at a stalemate. This has allowed other international actors, such as Russia, to assert its influence in Serbia and other states, seriously threatening state consolidation and Euro-Atlantic orientation of the Western Balkans.

The EU initiated a political dialogue negotiation process to resolve issues between Serbia and Kosovo related to the consolidation and ultimate recognition of Kosovo as an independent state. On 13 April 2013, the Brussels Agreement on normalization of relations between the two countries was signed. Despite the agreement, Serbia has been obstructing full consolidation of Kosovo as a sovereign independent state. The implementation has been stalled and negotiations have turned towards making a deal between Serbia and a segment of Kosovo's political elite to partition Kosovo. Wider public in Kosovo as well as the significant part of the political establishment have rejected the proposal.

In fact, Serbia has never given up on its project to partition Kosovo. In that it enjoys the strong support of Russia. The position of the United States is not clear. Macedonia and Montenegro both categorically reject any change of borders since the very idea directly threatens their territorial integrity and the stabilization of post-Yugoslav regional order.

In parallel, Serbia's international campaign against recognition of Kosovo and the media's demonization of Albanians and criminalization of their liberation

movement are intensifying. And while not surprising, but no less dangerous, after several unsuccessful attempts to involve Tirana in resolving the issue of Kosovo, Belgrade has finally succeeded and it requires strong condemnation.

The idea of partition of Kosovo should be denounced as unacceptable at all levels in the EU forums and at the level of individual European governments. Its furtherance in the Western Balkans threatens the stability and peace in the region and the credibility of EU commitments and support for the region. It would be dangerous precedent for entire Europe.

In light of the direction negotiations are taking and the danger it presents, we call on the EU to restart and facilitate negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo within the original dialogue framework focusing on full normalization of relations between the two countries and the recognition by Serbia of Kosovo's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its existing borders. All efforts towards the goal of partition must be resolutely rejected. The EU should also monitor implementation of the existing Brussels Agreement and condition the support for Serbia and Kosovo on the progress been made.

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia strongly believes that the EU will stand firm to its values and principles which have been indispensable in building democracy, peace and stability in the region for the last three decades. The advancement of those values and the further stabilization of the region and, thus, also the strengthening of Europe's stability and progress, are still at stake.

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