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## **Vuk Jeremic, Serbian Foreign Minister, on resolution of Kosovo crisis**

Interviewd by Ivana Cvetkovic

Serbia would even accept continuation of time-framed negotiations over Kosovo and Metohija

Serbia would even be prepared to accept the continuation of time-framed negotiations on Kosovo's future status, provided only they were substantive and fair, and conducted without prejudice to their outcome, said Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic for the "Blic" daily. He underlined that, although it was not a good idea to put a timescale on further negotiations, it would be far more important if they were fair and open. He added that the Serbian side was ready for a compromise regarding the duration of these negotiations only if they would be substantive in nature.

- We insist that the European Union speaks in favour of the new negotiations and assumes leadership in this respect, Minister Jeremic said for BLIC, responding to the message from Brussels that the EU will take responsibility and make a decision on Kosovo supported by the UN Security Council, if Russia persisted in its negative stance.

### **Does this mean that Serbia counts on the EU to push through the idea of further negotiations?**

- We trust and believe that common sense will prevail among all actors in the process and that unilateral steps will thus be avoided. It is crucial that the largest possible number of EU members support the idea of further negotiations. Let me clarify this point, I do not expect the EU to conduct future status negotiations and bring them to a conclusion, because such negotiations can take place only under UN auspices. Nevertheless, the EU should play an important role, because the future of the whole of the Western Balkans is with the EU.

**How will the opposing positions of Russia and the United States affect the further process?**

- The lack of an agreement means that, at this point in time, we cannot expect adoption of a resolution in the Security Council. Consequently, there are only two directions in which the situation can evolve. In other words, to continue to search for a solution that can get the support of the Security Council or to take unilateral action which would be extremely dangerous, both for our own and other regions of the world.

**If some countries recognize an independent Kosovo unilaterally, how will that affect Serbia's relations with those countries?**

- If a country decides to act unilaterally in violation of Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, we will have to re-examine the quality and the substance of our bilateral relations with that country. Should this happen, we would pay particularly close attention to the attitudes of our neighbours, as they bear special responsibility for safeguarding peace and stability in the region.

**What does this specifically mean?**

- I do not wish to be specific. To disclose such moves would be tactically unwise for my country. Serbia would certainly re-examine its relations and react. However, it must be clear that Serbia should not bring isolation on itself once again.

**Will recognition, if any, of independent Kosovo by EU member states affect Serbia's further process towards the EU?**

- Kosovo's status decision is not linked with Serbia's further European integration process.

**How realistic are announcements by the Serbian Government that Serbia can become an EU candidate country on 15 December 2008?**

- It is very realistic that we will manage to complete Stabilization and Association Agreement negotiations by September this year and have that agreement signed by the end of the year. The coming year will be see serious challenges to the reform process, that is, to our readiness to comply with all the obligations under the SAA. I believe that by the end of 2008, appropriate reform efforts will be made thus enabling the EU to decide on granting Serbia the status of a candidate country by the end of that year. This is a very ambitious plan and our country will have to race against time. But should we succeed, we will have all the records beaten, which I believe we will.

**Compliance with the requirement of cooperation with the ICTY will be the initial indicator of how realistic such efforts will be. Do you think that the EU will accept to sign the SAA if we hand over all indictees except for Mladic?**

- I would not like to dwell upon any individuals. What is of paramount importance is the existence of full political will on the part of the Serbian authorities. It will result in appropriate and transparent security activities demonstrating that Serbia is really doing its best to complete its cooperation with the ICTY. This will be the main criteria on which the EU will base its decision regarding the signing of the agreement. There must be full cooperation with the ICTY and this cooperation must be completed. However, I would not like to put any deadlines on it or link it with individual cases or arrests of individuals concerned.

**Are any deadlines for the arrest of indictees discussed in your meetings with international officials?**

- We are not discussing any deadlines. It is important that there exist a clear political commitment and a clear political readiness, and the willingness of the state to translate it into action, which should be transparent and clear to all, including Office of the Tribunal Prosecutor and representatives of other countries. What is crucial is trust. And I think that trust has been built.

**Will it be long before Serbia appoints its ambassadors to fill the vacancies throughout**

## **the world?**

- This question will be addressed shortly. In the meantime, the intensity and the quality of our relations with all the countries where, under the circumstances, we have not yet appointed ambassadors are at a very high level.

## **Will the ambassador to Montenegro be a politician, a renowned personality or a career diplomat?**

- The position of ambassador to Podgorica will be one of the most important positions in Serbia's future diplomatic network. For this reason it should be held by someone who best represents the interests of Serbia. The name of this person will be made known following the consultations in the Government but, as long as I am the Foreign Minister, Serbia will be represented by persons who, I believe, will best serve the interests of our country irrespective of whether they are prominent members of a political party or career diplomats.

## **Is there an agreement as to the location of the Serbian Embassy in Podgorica?**

- This is one of the subjects that will figure on the agenda during my visit to Podgorica tomorrow.

## *New human resource capacities as a priority*

- Our priority is to build new quality human resource capacities in diplomacy who will be able to come to grips with the challenges of diplomacy in the 21st century because, today, a successful diplomat is more of a lobbyist than a diplomat in the classical sense. I have already made arrangements with the Foreign Ministers of Sweden, Russia, Greece, Italy and Germany to include our young diplomats for training at their diplomatic academies, said Minister Jeremic for the "Blic" daily.