

"All options are on the table",

Says Serbian Foreign Minister Ivan Mrkic when asked about the dialogue with Kosovo, ICTY and emigration of Roma

1. Mr. Mrkic, you will meet your German counterpart on Wednesday. What will be the agenda of this meeting?

This will be our very first meeting, and its primary purpose is to get to know each other. Furthermore, we have both just come back from Israel, and we will surely also have an exchange on these visits. Serbia's accession to the European Union will, no doubt, be on the agenda as well.

2. The German side will probably raise the issue of an increased number of Roma migrants from Serbia. What will be your response to it?

I can say that we have done our best to prevent our Roma from departing. But this is not an easy thing to do. They are attracted by the living standard and high allowances provided for asylum seekers in Germany. Besides, our border with Hungary is very porous.

3. Have you done anything to prevent discrimination against the Roma population in your country?

The Roma population has not been discriminated against in Serbia. They simply follow their own lifestyle. This is not the problem faced only by Serbia, but also by Romania, as an EU member.

4. Many Roma are living in slums, made of wood huts, where there is no heating in wintertime.

There are Roma who have decided to live that way. We have tried our best on several occasions to help them change their minds. Even when they are provided an accommodation they leave for places where they will get more money.

5. Your Government is led by former Milosevic supporters. Do you feel reservation in Berlin or Brussels on that account?

Quite the opposite, reactions to the new Government were very positive, even in Germany. In the talks in Brussels there is also a very good atmosphere, especially in our discussions with Lady Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. We hear from them all the time that my Government is simply not promising what it cannot deliver. The former Government has undertaken the obligations in the dialogue with Pristina that we are now implementing. This is primarily true of the arrangement regarding the transport and traffic at the crossing points. By December pilot projects will be initiated for the first time at three crossing points.

6. Your neighbours, Bosnia and Croatia in particular, are nevertheless angry about the

statements made by President Nikolic in an interview claiming, among other things, that the Srebrenica massacre was no genocide.

I don't want to comment on that statement. I believe that there were certain apprehensions regarding the new Government after the elections. Meanwhile, we have had very good contacts with our neighbours. What poses a threat to these relations is the latest judgment rendered by the ICTY in The Hague, quashing the previous convictions of two Croatian generals last week. In this way, Serb victims have been degraded into second-rate victims or those that can be simply walked over. Even Serbs, who have been lobbying hard for cooperation with the ICTY over the last decade, are sadly disappointed, putting it in a diplomatic language. Apparently, that was a political decision.

7. Who could have exerted political influence over the Tribunal?

Only the judges responsible for making such a decision, three out of five of them, know the answer to it. The two judges who dissented clearly said that the judgment was devoid of any legal ground.

8. Should you be faced today with a decision whether or not to surrender Ratko Mladic, who is held responsible for the Srebrenica massacre, to The Hague, would you have handed him over?

This judgment has brought everything in question. There is not a single Croatian from Croatia who has been punished for a massacre against the Serbs. On the other hand, there are fifty Serbs, including senior military, police and intelligence officials, who have combined been sentenced to almost thousand years' imprisonment. The judgment has shattered a lot of the confidence in our region that we had worked hard to build. Nonetheless, we have decided to continue the reconciliation process.

9. How do you intend to improve relations with Kosovo?

The dialogue between us and Pristina, with the EU facilitation, has now been raised at our own initiative to a higher level, to that between our Prime Minister and the Pristina leadership. These talks are being conducted in a constructive atmosphere. However, no major sensitive issues have been brought up so far. The so-called Kosovars, or the ethnic Albanians of Serbia, would like to get everything they have been wishing for. In so doing, they enjoy the support of others, Germany included. If we really want a genuine sustainable solution, then such a solution must be acceptable to both parties. Ethnic Albanians have created the so-called state of their own in Serbian territory. We are ready to recognize this reality, but they too should do the same.

10. Would Serbia be prepared to accept their independence if territories were to be exchanged at the same time?

The past teaches us that in political negotiations all options are on the table. If parties are really and truly intent on finding a solution, they will find it. For us, the red line has been drawn by our Constitution. We would like Kosovo Albanians to lead a normal life, and we have no interest if

they suffer.

11. Under your Constitution, Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia. That rules out full independence.

We have to enter the talks and see what kind of vision for the future Pristina holds. Although Kosovo Albanians are strongly supported, their state cannot, however, become a full-fledged member of the United Nations without an agreement.

12. And if recognition of Kosovo is set by the EU as an accession requirement?

Then we will give up on membership.