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*Përparim Kryeziu*

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# KOSOVO SERBIA DIALOGUE IN LIGHT OF LATEST U.S. SPECIAL ENVOYS APPOINTMENTS

*By Përparim Kryeziu*

All direct attempt to induce a new dynamic and jumpstart the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue have gone blank thus far. Inadequate preparations, poor timing, and lack of consensus were the three main undercutting reasons why the European Union, including its two most renowned nations, Germany and France, have failed to facilitate the resumption of new rounds of talks since November 2018.

However, the recent events surely suggest that this time the amounted pressure will ultimately reignite the dialogue. To nobody's surprise, this wave has the name of the United States of America imprinted all over it.

On August 2019, the U.S. State department appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary Mathew Palmer as the special representative for the Western Balkans, responsible for assisting the region further integrate into the Western institutions. While Palmer's appointment is certainly a sign of fresh U.S. engagement and reaffirmation of its interest in the region, his role in relation to the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue remains unclear, despite the initial suggestions that due to his previous experience and expertise in the region, Palmer himself will be directly involved in the negotiating process.

Unexpectedly, the U.S. made yet another appointment. This one was cause for a surprise. On October 2019, the White House announced that President Trump has handpicked the U.S. ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell, as his special envoy for the talks between Kosovo and Serbia. Accordingly, he will lead the U.S. efforts to assist the negotiating parties reach a final agreement that should result in Serbia's formal recognition of Kosovo's independence.

Grenell's appointment, while welcomed, created confusion in Kosovo's public opinion. A surprise appointment in itself left many raising questions over his precise role in the process, his interplay with the other U.S. special representative in the Balkans, and his potential contribution given his limited knowledge and understanding of the region and mediocre experience in diplomacy.

Yet the two appointments alone constitute a major development and valuable contribution in the attempts to reinstate the dialogue as soon as possible.

They represent a strong and clear indication that the U.S. has a growing interest in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. This in of itself is a direct pressure on all parties involved over the uncompromised necessity that the dialogue must resume and conclude in the near future. Most importantly, they indicate U.S. willingness and intentions to become formally involved in the process as a party in the negotiation framework.

This is a turning point in the talks between Kosovo and Serbia.

Although U.S. has been closely supervising and monitoring the developments under the Brussels' facilitated dialogue, the responsibility to mediate a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia has been exclusively European Union's. However, a direct involvement of the U.S. is a cause for redesigning entirely the current framework of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

A newly designed framework suggests that the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue is no longer a regional responsibility of the European Union, but an immediate cause for broad international engagement.

The appointment of the two U.S. special representatives has triggered the direct involvement of other international actors in the form of special representatives of their own. Talks of an EU appointee as a special envoy for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue have intensified lately. There is also strong suggestion that individual European nations might also follow suit. Similarly, Russia's direct involvement is also expected.

All of the sudden, everyone wants a seat in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue table.

Such sense of urgency and intent from the international community is a loud siren for the incoming Prime Minister-designate, Albin Kurti and his new government after the historical electoral victory of October 6. The Kosovo-Serbia dialogue remains a national responsibility and an international obligation to Kurti's government just as much as to the previous one.

The dialogue process will expectedly resume promptly after the constitution of the new parliament of Kosovo and the formation of the new government sequentially. However, the resumption of the dialogue itself is not a strong suggestion that it may conclude any time soon. Despite the U.S. and other western allies' eagerness to do so, the success of new rounds of talks will be hanging on several issues. Among the determining factors in the final stages of resolving the last knot in the Balkans include the consensual agreement between the 'brokers' themselves over the basis for the new rounds of talks, current U.S. administration political instability amidst formal impeachment inquiry of President Trump, the result of upcoming elections in Serbia in March 2020 and later on in the U.S., and the role of Russia.