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Serbia's Road to EU and Kosovo

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A Western Balkans Conference was held on March 20, 2010 with the joint efforts of Ljubljana and Zagreb in Brdo near Kranj in Slovenia. The conference was aimed at bringing together the highest-level representatives of the regional countries after a gap of 18 years. This was to show to the international community that years of regional enmity was a thing of the past. However, Serbian President Boris Tadic, citing the invitation made to Kosovo, refused to attend the conference. Serbia thus revealed once again that Kosovo lies at the core of its foreign policy.

There are three known targets of Serbian foreign policy: Maintaining the struggle for Kosovo, joining the European Union and making Serbia the regional leader. One of the diplomatic drives launched by Serbia as part of its struggle for Kosovo was to carry Kosovo's independence declaration to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) with the support of the UN General Assembly. ICJ is to give advisory opinion in autumn 2010 at the latest regarding Kosovo's independence in terms of its eligibility with international law. Although the ruling by the ICJ will not be binding on the UN members, it has somewhat a legal and moral weight. Serbian officials are of the view that the process started at the ICJ was sufficient to stop the recognition of Kosovo's independence in its tracks. Belgrade is now dreaming that a convenient climate will emerge for Kosovo's status to be re-negotiated once the ICJ hands out a ruling in favor of Serbia. Nonetheless, Serbia is thinking of giving the countries which have recognized Kosovo a tough time under the roof of the UN by applying to the UN General Assembly a second time.

Serbia, by boycotting the Western Balkan Conference in Slovenia, demonstrated that it is trying to pursue a policy similar to that followed against the TRNC by the Greek Cypriot Sector. Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, in a speech he delivered on Serbia's state-run television RTS, acknowledged that the Greek Cypriot Sector serves as Serbia's mentor in order for Belgrade not to be unobtrusively deceived into recognizing Kosovo indirectly. Moreover, Yericic vowed that Serbia is going to continue waging its struggle for Kosovo just like the Greek Cypriot Sector has been against the TRNC.

Unlike Serbia's expectations, the referral of Kosovo's status to the ICJ has not ended the recognition granted to Kosovo but simply slowed it down. The interesting thing is that Yericic seems to be ignoring the fact that Kosovo, contrary to the case of the TRNC, has so far been recognized by 65 countries, including the heavyweights of the international arena. Whereas the Serbian officials proudly flaunt that two thirds of the UN member countries haven't recognize Kosovo's independence, the group of countries supporting Kosovo's independence is obviously more active in their efforts. A clear sign of this is the western countries' increased pressure on Serbia to get it to make concessions regarding Kosovo. As Serbian Foreign Minister Yericic made it clear in his address on March 3, 2010, Serbia would opt for Kosovo if it were to make a choice between EU membership and Kosovo, which confirms there is pressure coming from the west.

Brussels has not stipulated to date Kosovo's recognition as a pre-condition for Serbia's EU membership. However, Brussels does make it imperative for Serbia to maintain regional cooperation with all west Balkan countries. What is known is that Serbia has been displaying for the past two years a tough attitude toward those of its neighbors which have granted recognition to Kosovo. Belgrade believes that this tough attitude will force them to eventually

act in such a way as to favor Serbia's interests. In reality, Serbia is creating fresh troubles for itself because of its Kosovo policy both regionally and internationally.

This intransigent attitude neither gives Serbia the status of regional leader nor prevents Brussels from revising its Serbia policy. The EU dreading a new Cyprus issue in the Balkans has been working on a speeded-up EU membership formula for Serbia to compensate its Kosovo loss. However, Belgrade's Kosovo policy may not only distance Serbia from the EU but may also cause Brussels to assume a more severe attitude toward Belgrade.