

Kosovo: Eide Report Triggers Standards Debate

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In run-up to release of UN standards report, Serbs and Albanians assess progress on democratic and human rights goals.

The expected release of Kai Eide's report on whether Kosovo has met a series of standards necessary for final status talks is fuelling debate over the issue.

Eide, appointed earlier this year by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, to report on the extent to which Kosovo has met democratic and human rights standards, made several fact-finding visits here this summer.

His report - which is expected by the end of September will assess standards in the fields of institution-building, the rule of law, decentralisation, and, especially, the treatment of Kosovo Serbs and other minorities.

A positive report is considered a precondition for the start of long-awaited negotiations on Kosovo's final status.

Many Kosovo Albanians think the standards were set too high in the first place, however.

"Some are a bit too much," said Besim Kozmaqi, 35, a mechanic from Pristina. "We were victims of a brutal regime of the Serbs and now we are expected to accommodate them fully."

But there are some who are critical of their representatives for not doing enough to meet the UN's benchmarks.

Florent Hajrizi, 26, an Albanian civil society activist in Mitrovica, said, "It is clear that the progress made so far on standards could have been greater. Kosovo lacks a brave strong leader who could make the serious changes and preparations that are needed before status talks."

Some Albanians believe that most of the apparent positive progress made on standards has been a token effort, done purely to satisfy the international community rather than to make a difference on the ground.

"It is all done superficially to please the international community and I don't buy any of it," said Hajrizi.

Local Serbs - predictably - believe that Kosovo has achieved little on the human rights and democracy fronts. Few of this minority relish the thought of a positive report, which may mean Kosovo getting the green light to proceed towards independence.

Oliver Vujovic, 32, a coordinator of the NGO, Communication for Social Development, in the enclave of Gracanica, said, "I don't know what all the standards are, but I know that one concerns returns and peace and freedom of movement, and there has been no movement at all on that."

Vujovic said that whenever Serbs felt relations with Albanians had relaxed, and started to move around more, an “incident” or even a murder would send them hurrying back to the security of their enclaves.

“Some extremists want to keep all the Serbs enclosed in the enclaves,” added Vujovic. “That is the only space we consider secure to move around in at the moment.”

Oliver Ivanovic, a local Serb politician from the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija, agreed, saying little progress has been made on the standards and Eide’s report would reflect this – although he acknowledged that the overall atmosphere was less hostile towards his community.

“One positive thing is that the public rhetoric [about Serbs] is changing among the Kosovar leadership and in society as a whole,” he said.

Ivanovic cited the lack of economic development as a major obstacle in Kosovo.

“If people had more jobs than a year ago there would be less worry about inter-ethnic tolerance but the employment issue hasn’t improved a bit,” he concluded.

Hasani said he expected the Eide report to be critical of the overall fragility of its institutions, corruption and the lack of a clear plan for decentralisation of power to local authorities.

Enver Hoxhaj, an opposition deputy from the Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, predicted that as the countdown for the UN report neared, fingers of blame would be pointed at western officials administering the entity.

“The roles of all the factors [In Kosovo] must be evaluated,” he said. “This means that the work of UNMIK has to be considered, as it wields most executive powers.”

Ylber Hysa, a deputy from the liberal ORA party, said, “The international community spent most of the time in Kosovo doing crisis management instead of doing what they really came for, which is institution-building.”

While Serbs and Albanians have very different hopes and expectations on Kosovo’s future, most agree that some kind of decision must be made soon.

“People want to know where they live,” said Vujovic. “We can’t continue to live in the unknown for ever - standards or no standards.

“Either way, the outcome will be bad for one side – and we are all afraid of being hit by bad news. It is as if we all want to know what the future will hold, but at the same time we are asking God not to reveal it quite yet.”

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Location: Kosovo

Focus: Balkans: Regional Reporting & Sustainable

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kosovo-eide-report-triggers-standards-debate>