



8 FEBRUARY 2015

WHAT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED FROM THE JABLANOVIĆ CASE?

On 3 February, Prime Minister Isa Mustafa declared that the Minister for Communities and Return, Aleksandar Jablanović, was no longer part of the Government, on the eve of a new protest that was set to take place on 4 February. As a result, the protest has been suspended for the time being. Jablanović had come under heavy criticism from a large number of political parties, non-governmental organizations, media outlets and the general public after he referred to members of an organization of relatives of missing persons who had blocked the entrance to the Orthodox Church in Gjakovë/Đakovica while protesting the arrival of Serbs to attend the Christmas liturgy as “savages”. At the same time, Srpska lista’s ministers in the government have been under fire since the establishment of the new Kosovo government in December 2014 for statements which indicated that they either ignored or do not recognize the independence of Kosovo, in line with the official standpoint of the Serbian government. On 24 January, a large number of people took part in a protest called by Vetëvendosje, AAK, and “Nisma për Kosovën” demanding Jablanović’s resignation and the adoption of a new Law on Public Enterprises, which would nationalize the Trepça/Trepča mining complex. In a follow-up protest on 27 January, violent clashes broke out between protestors and Kosovo Police.

It remains unclear what will be the outcome of Mustafa’s decision to dismiss Jablanović with regard to continued participation of Srpska lista in the government. On Thursday 5 February, Jablanović and the other Kosovo ministers of Srpska lista met in Belgrade with Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić and Marko Đurić, Director of the Serbian Governmental Office for Kosovo and Metohija. It was agreed that a decision on the continued participation of Srpska lista in the Kosovo government would be taken after the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo are resumed in Brussels on 9 February. Đurić and Jablanović sharply condemned the dismissal of Jablanović as a rushed and politicized decision that had no connection with Jablanović’s statement, which had not been directed to the Albanian community in Kosovo but only to those that had violently blocked the entrance to the Orthodox Church in Gjakovë/Đakovica.¹ At the same time, Đurić interpreted the dismissal of Jablanović along ethno-national lines, arguing that it was a humiliation of Srpska lista that was directed towards the entire Serb community in Kosovo.²

Whatever the outcome of these developments, the ethnically framed controversies over Jablanović unveil that national tensions in politics can easily mobilize the general population as a venue to vent broader frustrations with the poor socio-economic situation and prospects and perception of widespread corruption. True, there were some voices who argued that a distinction should be made

¹ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=02&dd=05&nav_category=640&nav_id=954971;
<http://koha.net/?id=27&l=43695>

² http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=02&dd=05&nav_category=640&nav_id=955181

between Jablanović's statements and the Serbian community in Kosovo at large.³ There are also Kosovo Serb representatives who have argued that Jablanović should resign because his statement offended many Albanians and that the government should focus on solving issues that affect the daily lives of citizens.⁴ Generic Albanian–Serb ethnic tensions were, however, prominently present in the demonstrations and protests of the last month. It is indicative that the people did not take to the streets to demonstrate during last year's political stalemate over the government formation or to express their dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic situation in Kosovo, but did choose to demonstrate over Albanian–Serb tensions in the Kosovo government and in relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Ethno-national confrontation is also evident in the reaction of Belgrade officials to the dismissal of Jablanović. These rising ethnic tensions could be detrimental to the achievements that have been attained with regard to the harmonization and integration of Serb communities in the Kosovo framework. Especially Serb communities south of the Ibër/Ibar River are vulnerable in such a situation, though it is encouraging that no inter-ethnic incidents have been reported during this period of political confrontation.

Bearing in mind the smoldering rise of ethnic tensions against the background of the controversies over Minister Jablanović, the government should take measures to prevent internal disputes within the government from taking public dimensions along ethnic lines. The lacking coherence and looming confrontational politics within the government not only generate ethnic confrontations that might be very harmful for Albanian–Serb harmonization within Kosovo, but are also very unproductive for the work of the government at a crucial period in Kosovo's attempts at European integration and internal stabilization. The new government has hardly taken any decision since it was established, while the country was teetering on the brink of civil unrest. Additionally, other communities have been marginalized in the on-going debate on community relations and processes, which has completely centered on Albanian–Serb relations and confrontation.

The coalition partners, the PDK–LDK and Srpska lista, need to agree on a set of principles which will pave the way for a consensual, coordinated working environment between Albanian and Serb representatives in the Government of Kosovo, regardless of the different political positions its members hold on the status of Kosovo. The basis of this working agreement should be a clear distinction between the political aspirations of ministers and any government officials as members of their respective political parties, and their work and statements in the capacity of head of the institution s/he legally represents and member of the government of the Republic of Kosovo.

Serb representatives in the Kosovo government in particular should refrain from making statements on the big issue of the status of Kosovo and its relations with Serbia. This question should be dealt with as part of the EU-facilitated dialogue on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo and not become a matter of internal discord within the Kosovo institutions. Moreover, statements that even merely indirectly or symbolically engage with the question of Kosovo's status have proven unproductive for the treatment of the many concrete and tangible issues the Serb and other communities in Kosovo are facing and that await decision-making, such as the socio-economic conditions, access to rule of law and qualitative health care, the employability of students of Serbian educational institutions in Kosovo and the incentives for cultural contact and expression.

³ <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/oped/pranvera-e-arabeve-te-prishtines-77694/>; <http://koha.net/?id=31&o=508>.

⁴ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=01&dd=29&nav_category=640&nav_id=952532.

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POLICY BRIEF

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About ECMI Kosovo

ECMI Kosovo is the principal non-governmental organisation engaged with minority issues in Kosovo, with the overarching aim to develop inclusive, representative, community-sensitive institutions that support a stable multi-ethnic Kosovo. ECMI Kosovo contributes to the developing, strengthening and implementation of relevant legislation, supports the institutionalisation of communities-related governmental bodies, and enhances the capacity of civil society actors and the government to engage with one another in a constructive and sustainable way.