



ZERI, 11/03/04

Can the Mitrovica problem be solved before the issue of Kosovo's status is opened?

Rexhepi and Prodi will also talk about solving the Mitrovica Problem?

Is there a will in the EU and in the US to start a fruitful process considering the reunification of Mitrovica town? Why has ESI's project to create a municipality of Zvecan - North Mitrovica has created interest in Brussels? Does ESI's project have the support from the Kosovar side?

Which perception will dominate among Albanians and Serbs if the municipality of Zvecan will be created in North Mitrovica?

Will there finally be a move to solve the Mitrovica problem, the town that is divided even five years after the International Administration is in Kosovo?

This will be the main question, which will dominate in Brussels while PM Rexhepi will be there. The PM's agenda is to participate a continued roundtable of the European Stability Initiative (ESI) and the meeting with Romano Prodi, the Head of the European Commission. "Zëri" found out from international sources that Prodi is very interested in the ESI proposal and for that reason he wants to see what the Prime Minister's view is. On the other hand it is known that Javier Solana, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Policy and Security, during his last visit to Pristina, pointed out that the Mitrovica problem should be solved by the beginning of next year, or before the final evaluation of the standards. If the EU, US and UNMIK will support Solana, this will mean that Mitrovica with all its problems and the threat of partition will be moved off agenda before the final status of Kosovo will be under examination, if this will happen, than the issue of status will be easier to solve, or at least less complicated.

The ESI proposal as we can see is trying to find a compromise solution, which can satisfy parts concerned, Serbs and Albanians. For Albanians Kosovo-wide the division of Mitrovica means the division of Kosovo.

For the Serbs in North Mitrovica, the reunification of the town will mean giving up hope that this part of Kosovo will be part of Serbia and on the other hand with the unification of the town Serbs in the North will be convinced that they will come under the control of an Albanian majority.

ESI with this model of solving the issue is trying to concede to both Albanian and Serb concerns: With a Zvecan-North Mitrovica municipality, Serbs will have the possibility to be the majority in the municipality. But with the creation of this

municipality we will be out of risk of partition, because the return of IDPs will start on the both sides, freedom of movement will be solved and the economic situation will improve.

Actually, it is not very clear if ESI has any support from relevant politicians at the central government level for this proposal. What we know is that the authorities of the local government in Mitrovica are against this proposal, because they believe that the proposal will legalize the current (factual) situation, which was created against the will of the citizens after July 1999.

The local authorities, as was expected, asked UNMIK to fulfill the plans for the unification of the town. The last plan, which failed, was the Michael Steiner plan, in November 2002. Steiner's objective was to unify the town with an international local administration arguing that local elections will improve town governance.

If there is a real will in Brussels to solve the Mitrovica issue and to find a solution before we enter in the most delicate phase then this interest should continue and be our concern and continued objective and should be made public as soon as possible.

We are saying this because we know that Vojuslav Kostunica a few days ago came up with the proposal for the canonization and ethnicisation of political authority in Kosovo, which is his objective for the current populace in the North and in the enclaves.

The standards in Kosovo have been seen above all as a process of de-enclavisation of the enclaves and the reunion of Mitrovica. Nevertheless we should not be surprised that Kostunica and his supporters, elaborating on a model of cantonization try to interrupt the standards process altogether.

Otherwise, if we go back to ESI's proposal it can be said that in principal it is a serious attempt to understand what has to be done to solve the Mitrovica issue. The justification and the arguments of the proposed model by ESI, we have the impression, do not consider how the creation of a Zvecan-North Mitrovica municipality will really be perceived by the Serbs and Albanians. Perception even if its not real or well argued, can become the political driving force for people on both sides. If we go ahead concretely with this proposal, even if there will be many clarifications (explanations), also by local politicians, both Serb and Albanian, the impression which will predominate is a sense of giving in to partition. In that case we will have to face the consequences resulting from this perception.