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The Prime Minister of Kosovo, Bajram Rexhepi supports ESI Initiative for Mitrovica

Mr. Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, welcomed the Prime Minister of Kosovo Mr. Bajram Rexhepi on Thursday, while prior to the meeting with Prodi, Rexhepi attended a conference organized by the European Stability Initiative over the divided city of Mitrovica: This conference was also attended by a member of Kosovo Assembly from the Serb coalition “Return”, Mr. Oliver Ivanovic.

Mr. Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission in Belgium, welcomed the Prime Minister of Kosovo Mr. Bajram Rexhepi on Thursday. The European Commission is otherwise recognized also as the European Government where Mr. Romano Prodi is the President the European Commission. This was the first meeting of the President of the European Commission with the Prime Minister of the government of Kosovo. This is not a small or purely symbolic step for small Kosovo and its aspiration to become a constitutional part of the European Union as soon as possible. The meeting Rexhepi-Prodi lasted approximately half an hour, while all what the media could capture from this meeting was only their hand shaking. The Prime minister of Kosovo Mr. Bajram Rexhepi told the media and accredited journalists, about the practical and symbolic importance of the first meeting with the President of the European Commission and the Prime minister of Kosovo. The Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Rexhepi informed the media that today’s meeting was good, even if the meeting was held “under the shadow of the tragedy occurred in Spain”, reads the statement. Further he stated, that he discussed with the President of the European Commission Mr. Prodi, the standards for Kosovo and their importance, the Stabilization and Association Tracking Mechanisms for the European Union, the current situation in Kosovo and the region. Mr. Bajram Rexhepi said to journalists, that Mr. Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission stressed the importance of the Balkans for its integration into the European Union.

Continued debate on the ESI plan for Mitrovica

The Prime Minister of Kosovo Mr. Bajram Rexhepi, before the meeting with Mr. Prodi, the President of the European Commission, attended a conference organized by the European Stability Initiative on the divided city of Mitrovica.

This conference was organized in cooperation with the prestigious Belgian foundation “King Baudouin Foundation”, and apart from the Prime Minister of Kosovo Mr. Rexhepi, Mr. Oliver Ivanovic, deputy of the Kosovo parliament for the Serb coalition “Return”, also attended this meeting, the director of the European Stability Initiative Mr. Gerald Knaus, the president of the Belgian foundation Gerrit Rauës, the UNMIK Regional Administrator for Mitrovica and Finnish Lady Ms. Minna Järvenpää, the representatives of the diplomatic core in Brussels and others. The prime minister of Kosovo Mr. Bajram Rexhepi, before coming to the conference, had an important meeting at the NATO Headquarters, where the situation in Kosovo was evaluated to be stable, thanks to the work and great commitment of the KFOR troops.

At the conference for Mitrovica, where the main discussion point was the latest report prepared by the ESI Institute on how to solve the problem of Mitrovica, media interests was very high, especially from Balkans. After the opening speech delivered by the host of the Belgian foundation, the floor was open for the UNMIK Mitrovica Regional Administrator Ms. Minna Järvenpää. Ms. Järvenpää started her speech with a poetry written by the British known writer Salman Rushdi, about a ‘sad town’, which hardly continued to breath and survive on earth because the town was caught in a trap. Ms. Järvenpää further continued to report on the current situation in Mitrovica, citing that this town continues to be sad and disappointing with a lot of problems. This is the first concrete economic and political proposal submitted since the division of the city of Mitrovica, on how to get out of the crisis prevailing in this town, said Ms Minna Järvenpää.

UNMIK Mitrovica regional Administrator, Ms Minna Järvenpää, also said, that it is true, that by solving the problem of Mitrovica, we will not solve the problem of the entire Kosovo, but it will help solving other issues. We need help from the international community in order to make this project possible, while investments are needed in order to avoid the economic crisis that people of Mitrovica at both sides are currently facing, Ms. Järvenpää further said. She also appealed that ‘in case the situation in Mitrovica continues as it is, it will become worse’.

In this context, the President of the ESI Institute Mr. Gerald Knaus, mentioned the work of ESI which is based on more than two years of analysis on the ground and has also been taking into account the concrete reactions of people in Mitrovica. The speech of Mr. Knaus focused on three aspects, which gave particular interest to the economic situation in both sides of Mitrovica, emphasizing the situation in Northern Mitrovica more than in the South, where the Diaspora has played an important role, so Albanians are more independent (economically) and well-being compared to Serbs who continue to be funded by Belgrade, but do not know how long this will last. According to Mr. Knaus, who tried to summarize in a few words what has been written in the proposal of ESI to resolve the problem of Mitrovica, three basic elements are required. The first compromise is according to Mr. Knaus is that the international community promises not to withdraw

from the town after any potential resolution. The second compromise is full freedom of movement of citizens and full property rights for Albanians and Serbs, and the third element is that Albanian politicians in Pristina should agree on the two elements mentioned above and should agree that the Northern part of the city of Mitrovica joins the municipality of Zvečan in order to eliminate the fear of Serbs to be dominated by Albanians, as Mr. Knaus explained that the Northern part of the town is only two and a half kilometers big. The ESI President stressed again the importance of the so-called economic factor. The international community should revive this city through donations and investments, because this town has been losing its population since the “Trepca” factory went out of operation and as a result of huge economic problems.

PM of Kosovo Bajram Rexhepi; I do support the ESI project for Mitrovica, but it doesn't mean that I agree with everything

The prime minister of Kosovo Bajram Rexhepi, a citizen and the first former Mayor of the city of Mitrovica supported the work of ESI. It is true that most of the problems are related to the economy, but the statement also reads that we cannot forget about the political problems. According to Rexhepi, what is important and crucial for Kosovo and Mitrovica is that the current status –quo should not continue further, because the status – quo in Mitrovica presents a risk for Kosovo and also for the implementation of the standards. In order to be clear to the media, Rexhepi said; we support the ESI initiative, which does not mean that a person has to agree with everything that is included in the proposal, but it is very important that for a first time there is a concrete proposal to solve the problem of the divided city of Mitrovica. In this sense, Rexhepi also said that it could be great if other countries from the European Union and USA could take concrete steps on this issue, through working groups to discuss and do something about this and other similar proposals.

A Kosovo member of the parliament and representative of the Serb coalition “Return”, Oliver Ivanovic did not fully support this idea, he preferred more ‘discretion’ to address this problem, he also said; “I agree on many points with the prime minister Rexhepi”, in the meantime he said that we do not need a big presence of Americans or Europeans to assist with the resolution of the problem of the city of Mitrovica, this issue should be resolved on the local level, reads the statement.

In the meantime, Ivanovic congratulated the work and the ESI project saying that the problems are the same for both sides, Albanians and Serbs, starting with the economy, infrastructure, electricity, water and so on.

The ESI representatives in this case declared once more that they are a non-governmental organization, and they cannot do a lot, but they have noticed that the echo and the response in the media and from politicians on both sides, Albanian and Serb, was positive, the statement reads. The same is true for western countries, Brussels and the EU Contact Group countries, hoping that something more concrete can be done for the discussion and realization of this proposal, which is the first one since the division of Mitrovica.