



## **SERBIA**

### **EXCLUSIVE | Interview with the Ambassador of Serbia to Romania, Štefan Tomasevic, on the Current Crisis in Kosovo**

#### **Tensions in Kosovo have escalated sharply following the decision of the government in Pristina, led by Prime Minister *Albin Kurti*, to dismantle Serbian institutions in several enclaves**

This measure has directly affected over 1,000 Serbs, who have lost their jobs, and approximately 40,000 people, who are now without essential administrative and social services.

Serbia has strongly condemned this action and announced measures to support the Serbian community in Kosovo. Meanwhile, the European Union has called for dialogue, but the risk of escalation remains high.

In this context, we speak with the Serbian Ambassador to Romania, Mr. Stefan Tomasevic, to understand Belgrade's official perspective on the recent events and the possible regional and international consequences.

## **I General Context of the Kosovo Crisis**

### **Your Excellency, how do you evaluate the decision of the Pristina government to dismantle Serbian institutions in Kosovo?**

Dismantling of Serbian institutions in Kosovo and Metohija is much more than incident how some actors used to call it . It is another more step made by provisional institutions headed by Albin Kurti aimed to make life of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija unbearable.

### **Do you consider this action a direct provocation against the Serbian community? What do you believe Albin Kurti's government intends to achieve?**

Serbian community is resolute to sustain on their fireplaces but pressure they are facing with is enormous. They are continuously exposed to brutal violence. I will remind you on neglecting of basic human rights reflected in daily harassment and terror. Serbs are facing on a daily level with arrests without legal basis, beatings, bans of Serbian goods and currency. It's not hard to conclude that final expulsion Serbs from our south province is the main goal.

**What impact does this measure have on the daily lives of Serbs in Kosovo and the stability of the region?**

Serbs are disabled to get their salaries, pensions and social givings on the territory of our province. They are literally in ghetto. After all Post offices were shut down together with other institutions, people are not working, lacking elementary health care due to the fact that Kurti's regime baned medicaments which are coming from Serbia, including oxygen and elementary medicaments. Impact of this measures on Serbian community life is crucial and like result we have almost 20% of Serbs which left the province in last 2 years. EU representatives have to consider that is not possible to keep their eyes closed anymore. Consequences are clear and responsibility must be taken for incrising number of displaced Serbs day by day.

## **II Serbia's Response and Actions Taken**

**The Serbian government has announced financial support for affected Serbs? Can you detail these measures?**

Serbia were helping and will help on different ways and different levels our population in Kosovo and Metohija. On financial and substantial way, with invesments and all necessary engagement.

Despite the provocations aimed to military reaction, Serbia is very responsible, keeping peace and stability in the whole region, but red lines exist and definitely Serbia will not allow expelling population from their own territory by those who are sentenced terrorists and just changed uniforms and forest with suits and offices.

**Are other diplomatic or economic measures being considered to counter Pristina's decision?**

Decisions made by EU are weak and even some sanctions exist on paper, they are without any consequences and results and so called prime minister together with other representatives of privisional institutions in Priština are encouraged to work further towards oppresion over Serbs.

Serbia is deeply grateful to Romania and majority of the UN member countries which are standing firm and resolute, respecting International Public Law.

**Are there legal strategies Serbia can use to protect Serbian citizens in Kosovo from these actions?**

The biggest problem exactly is the fact that all these insane decisions are made unilaterally contrary to the Brussels and all other agreements. UN Resolution 1244 and provisions of all the following agreements were flagrantly violated.

**How has the international community reacted so far? Do you believe the EU and the UN should intervene more firmly?**

12 years after Brussels Agreement were signed and guaranteed by EU, Priština didn't fulfill the main obligation – forming Association of Serbian Municipalities. We need voices of many actors and to be as much vocal as they can. We should not allow that darkness prevail.

Serbian Patriarch Porfirije whose seat is in Peć was refused on Christmas and many times after to enter Kosovo and Metohija and spend time with orthodox Serbian believers. Many other, including the highest representatives of Serbian institutions are not allowed to cross administrative line, by decisions of provisional institutions of self government in Priština.

### **III Prospects for Serbia Kosovo Dialogue**

**Do you believe that the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina facilitated by the EU can still progress after this episode?**

We showed that we believe in dialog because this is the best possible way for overcoming crisis, but obviously we were naive as well. We believe that things could be changed with additional effort, specially from those our partners who previously recognised so called Kosovo. It's clear that it was a huge mistake and I think that many of them realising this fact.

**What are Serbia's expectations from the European Union at this moment?**

We expect fairly treatment and at least equal position. We are insisting on much more care for Serbian population under enormous pressure in their own country.

Those actors – representatives of provisional institutions in Priština, who are generators of violence, social tensions and expulsion should be called on responsibility but not awarded. The EU should avoid generalizations and appeals to both sides. It is necessary to clearly mark the culprit when an incident occurs, but also to really monitor the effects of all harmful measures directed against Serbs.

**In your opinion is this decision by Kurti politically motivated considering the upcoming parliamentary elections in Kosovo in February?**

Without any doubt, the attack on Serbian institutions serves daily political purposes and is intended as a message to the electorate on the one hand. However, we should not forget about the

continuity of actions of temporary institutions in Priština against the interests of the Serbian population in the province.

## **IV Regional and European Implications**

### **Could this crisis destabilize the entire Balkans?**

We must be aware of the fact that Serbia is doing everything to avoid a conflict that would inevitably lead to the destabilization of the entire region. That is why Serbia must not be left alone, but must be supported in order to find sustainable solutions. Escalation of any kind is the least suitable for Serbia, while it is developing and growing economically at a high speed. Economic and cultural cooperation should be the common goal of the entire region.

### **Is there a risk that current tensions could escalate into an open conflict between Serbia and Kosovo?**

Serbia believes in peace. Serbia is doing everything it can to ensure that peace prevails. That's how it is today, and that's how it was throughout our history.

Nevertheless, when in the most difficult period of world and European history it was necessary to defend the most valuable thing we have, which is freedom, the Serbs were on the right side of history, defending European values with their lives from the Middle Ages to the First and Second World Wars.

### **How does this situation affect Serbia's relations with the EU and Serbia's EU accession negotiations?**

I think that the European integration of Serbia can go much faster. The fact that not a single chapter within the cluster has been opened for 3 years indicates that there is a serious slowing down of processes that Serbia has not influenced, taking into account all the results it has achieved in the meantime in the fields of the rule of law, including the implementation of recommendations, improvement of infrastructure, strengthening of the economy.

Along the way, Serbia is also waiting for Chapter 35, which concerns the normalization of relations with the so-called Kosovo. It is a specific chapter that no other member has had in their journey. So many specifics, but we believe that the European Union needs Serbia at least as much as Serbia needs the European Union.

## **V Serbia's Message to Romania and the International Community**

### **What message is Serbia sending to its international partners at this critical moment?**

Faced with injustice in continuity, Serbs need to feel that last things perpetrated against them should signify something to those who has power to exert pressure on and sway the irrational provisional authorities. Unfortunately they could only see until this moment and they believe that everything is permitted to be done to the Serbs up until the point of their permanent and total expulsion.

**How do you see Romania's position in this crisis What are Serbia's expectations from Bucharest?**

We are very grateful for the principled position of Romania on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, which is based on respect for the norms of international public law. Respect for our territorial integrity and sovereignty is an important factor in our rich and valuable bilateral relations, which we strive to further improve day by day.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak for your media about the details related to the position of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, because not enough is known about it. Very important aspect is finding an adequate space in the media space full of misinformation, in order to point out the real state of affairs.

We count on Romanian support further on, based on facts and figures. We were together always on right side of history, defending European and traditional values and our freedom. We should always support right things, but in case of Serbia and Romania we should do it vocally and without any barriers on all levels and everywhere.

**What is your message to the Serbs in Kosovo who are facing this difficult moment?**

My message to the Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija is to endure as they did many times before throughout our history. After the rain comes the sun, and only hard times give birth to heroes. We strive for peace and well-being, praying to God and for those who commit injustices, but never giving up our country, family and sanctuaries, ready to defend them.

As one of them, because part of my family is in Kosovo and Metohija, and my grandfather and my father were born there, I tell them that while we are alive, we must not give up, and we must teach our descendants the same. What was stolen will one day be returned. Serbia will tirelessly fight for its interests, primarily through diplomatic means.

**In your opinion is there still a diplomatic and peaceful solution for this situation What steps should be taken?**

There is always a diplomatic solution, the only question is whether there is will. Serbia is determined to solve problems through dialogue. Unfortunately, there are more and more problems created by irresponsible individuals who, instead of economic progress, cultural and any other

cooperation and development, choose conflicts, all in the absence of politics and due to sick ambitions and pretensions.

Due to the large number of crises in the World, let's hope for much more sense, understanding and justice, which we desperately need. And what I think is realistic, I won't spoil the text.

## **Conclusion and Final Message**

Ambassador Stefan Tomasevic plays a crucial role in bilateral diplomacy between Serbia and Romania, and the ongoing Kosovo crisis is once again testing the stability of the Balkans.

Serbia reaffirms its position as the protector of the rights of Serbs in Kosovo, while the European Union must navigate another point of tension in its immediate neighborhood.

- Will diplomatic dialogue succeed in de-escalating the situation, or are we heading toward a regional conflict?
- What role can Romania and the European Union play in maintaining stability in the Balkans?

These are the key questions this interview aims to clarify and address with realistic solutions.