

The opening remarks of Ms. Jadranka Jelincic, Executive Director of Open Society Foundation – Serbia, at the presentation of “Dialogue on Kosovo: The Attitudes of Citizens of Serbia on the future of Kosovo” public opinion survey (Media Center Belgrade, Apr. 19<sup>th</sup> 2018)

The survey, whose results are in front of you, the Open Society Foundation – Serbia has commissioned in the context of “Internal Serbian dialogue on Kosovo” initiative.

The survey results are published at the end of the first phase of the dialogue because they may and should be useful to:

- Decision makers which will formulate a solution for Kosovo and, equally important, provide arguments for the proposed solution;
- Participants of the second phase of the dialogue, for their proposals, debates and arguments have so far not contributed to citizens getting the answers to the questions on which their stand on proposed solution will depend.

The initiative for opening a dialogue on Kosovo is certainly a noble and unique political gesture.

Whether the way the dialogue was organized and if the opportunity opened by the initiative has been used most effectively, should be left to citizens to estimate. Is Kosovo-related complex of topics, and to what extent important to citizens (“it is our fate“, the question of identity, etc.), may also be a question of subjective perceptions.

So, what are the implacable numbers saying:

- Kosovo-related complex of topics is just one of 15 issues the citizens are continually mentioning over the past two decades, as the most significant political and development priorities;
- Kosovo is always oscillating between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> place; even the initiative to solve the Kosovo issue “once and forever” has not

managed to change that. For only 4% of citizens it is the most important issue; and for the next 10%, one of the 3 most important.

- In two decades' continuity around 50% of citizens are not at all or scarcely following the affairs and events related to Kosovo. In August 2017, the initiative of the President of the Republic did raise the citizens' interest – more than half has started to follow the Kosovo-related themes. However, the course of the dialogue and the way it was guided in December 2017 have resulted with as much as 60% of citizens stating they not at all or scarcely follow the affairs and events related to Kosovo.

Perhaps the “Belgrade New Year’s tree case” drew their attention on the other side.

Be it as it may, after 9 months of the guided dialogue the survey results unambiguously say the following: citizens lack information about issues that will be crucial for their position on a proposed resolving of a set of Kosovo-related issues. What it is the citizens of Serbia do not know?

- They are not clear what Serbia wants and what are the long-term plans when Kosovo is concerned, because the Serbian authorities have never – not even now – sent a message to the people what the goal is, and more importantly, how it can be achieved.

At the same time the citizens of Serbia have a clear position they are not ready for major sacrifices or renunciation related to Kosovo: 85% would never settle in Kosovo – if it is a condition for preserving Kosovo as part of Serbia; 82% would not live under the extraordinary measures due to decreased safety; 77% would not accept part of salaries or pensions being allocated for the project of preserving Kosovo inside Serbia, etc.

- They are not familiar with numbers – and they are interested so as to take informed position - how much does Kosovo

currently costs. What is the market structure like; how much can be earned from the resources in Kosovo and how? Citizens of Serbia will get answers to these questions tomorrow, thanks to another project supported by the Open Society Foundation Serbia – “Economic, Demographic and Social Effects of Potential Scenarios of Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Prishtina”.

- What else the citizens of Serbia do not know: they do not know how either Serbs or Albanians are living in Kosovo. They particularly lack information about Serbs living south of the Ibar river, and there is more of them than in north Kosovo.
- They do not know what is the exact content of 3 solutions on offer (*status quo*; exchange of territories/border demarcation deal; normalization of relations). First of all they do not know what the most frequently mentioned term “normalization of relations with Kosovo” means and what is “Brussels Agreement(s)” – which is not much of a honor primarily to political elites of Serbia, having in mind that Brussels negotiations are conducted for EIGHT years already. This piece of information speaks for itself regarding the state of democracy in Serbia, more than all global indexes measuring the degree of democracy in a particular country. It also echoes like thunder, about the attitudes toward political responsibility and honest political intentions of all those being in power during the past 8 years. Further, it speaks about other institutions of democratic society too: about the media, but also about the civil society.

These results are calling out and inviting:

- Decision makers, after the first phase of dialogue not only to propose solutions – but to JUSTIFY them;

- Participants of the second round of dialogue to do the same when commenting on, criticizing or promoting the proposed solution.

And if it does not happen, this attempted “victory” will too be limited to what we have seen in the first round of dialogue, in the words of a participant: “the contest of mythomaniac statements of loyalty where Kosovo remains the territory, and not the people; only Serbian, and not Albanian too; marked by KLA crimes, and not the crimes of Serbian forces too“. But this time there are indications South Serbia might transform alike.

Regardless of all shortcomings and the objections we may have regarding the dialogue, it is worth taking part in it. The survey results are showing this. Those who were the loudest – even in mythomania – somehow managed to reach out to the uninformed citizens who have easily accepted their theses in the absence of better arguments. Here is how:

- In December 78% - 1% more than in August – was ready to allocate part of salaries and pensions for the project of preserving Kosovo;
- In December 28% of citizens – compared to 19% in August - believed that postponing the solution will not weaken Serbia’s negotiating position regarding Kosovo;
- The number of those considering the postponing of a solution as the key obstacle for the economic development of Serbia declined from 55% in August to 46% in December.