

# Can Serbia Trust Washington's Assurances in Upcoming Meeting with Kosovo?

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*It came as a shock to everyone when it was announced yesterday that discussions and negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo will take place at the White House in Washington on June 27. This came as a surprise as it was widely believed that President Donald Trump had no interest in the Kosovo issue and was satisfied to allow the Europeans to mediate it.*

Richard Grenell, the U.S. president's special envoy for Kosovo, believes there is a possibility to reach at least an agreement on economic cooperation. He said [on Twitter](#) that he "received the commitment from" both governments to attend the June 27 Washington talks and to "temporarily pause the derecognition campaign and the seeking of international memberships."

If either side is unsatisfied with the June 27 discussions then they will go back to the status quo after they leave Washington.

As we have consistently said, we must first make progress on growing the economies. This is the focus. I look forward to these discussions. (2/2)

<https://t.co/r5QLDuC1XI>

— Richard Grenell (@RichardGrenell) [June 15, 2020](#)

Although Kosovo illegally broke off from Serbia in February 2008 and received recognition from a majority of countries around the world, Belgrade has pursued a successful diplomatic push to have states derecognize Kosovo, with the most recent being the West African country of Sierra Leone on March 2 of this year. To date, 15 countries have withdrawn their recognition of an independent Kosovo, making the split between international recognition and non-recognition at about 50% each. Belgrade's campaigning has also hindered Kosovo's efforts for membership in international organizations like Interpol and UNESCO.

With a temporary truce in place, Washington is hoping to establish trade relations between Serbia and Kosovo, with Grenell saying "if either side is unsatisfied with the June 27 discussions then they will go back to the status quo after they leave Washington. As we have consistently said, we must first make progress on growing the economies."

If we look at what Grenell has already said publicly, it appears that he is confident that an agreement can be reached regarding open economic cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina. Such an agreement would help create some momentum before the next round of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina on finalizing the status of Kosovo.

With the U.S. inundated with domestic issues, like the out of control coronavirus pandemic

and the Black Lives Matter movement, foreign policy issues, with the exception of perhaps China, will not play a major role in the upcoming presidential election, giving Trump more freedom to pursue certain issues. This is in addition to a mainstream media that are oriented against Trump and will not emphasize any of his successes in the foreign policy field.

This announced meeting comes as only a few days ago Trump said that he would no longer engage in experiments to create new states that are not capable of surviving on their own, such as Kosovo. It is for this reason that we can interpret Grenell's statement that things will return to the status quo if parties are not satisfied with the results of the upcoming talks as a demonstration of Trump's loose support for Kosovo's Albanians as Washington will not put demands against Serbia. This statement is a result of the growing frustration that the White House, the State Department, and even Grenell himself has because of the unstable political situation in Pristina.

Albanian influence in Washington is losing ground, with only minimal support in Congress, especially in the House of Commons, where one of their key allies, Eliot Engel, is also the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He tried to impose the views of previous administrations through testimonies, writing letters and public appearances, criticizing the Trump administration's policy regarding negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina. However, he has been mostly ignored by the president.

There has been no progress in the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina in finalizing Kosovo's status and the U.S. has virtually no trust in Kosovo leader Hashim Thaçi and the entire political elite in Pristina. However, Grenell would not have organized a meeting in the White House if he was not confident that some kind of economic agreement could be reached between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić emphasized yesterday that Serbia will certainly not agree to the recognition of Kosovo's independence while in Washington. Similar statements also came from Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, who is wary of Pristina's consent to suspend the campaign for admission to international institutions.

“The problem is, however, that we do not trust the Albanians in Pristina, because they have always lied and made unilateral moves,” Dačić said.

He added that if what Grenell announced on Twitter was true, Belgrade expects Pristina to immediately withdraw the requests for membership that it submitted to international organizations.

It is likely that for Trump it is unimportant whether Serbia continues its campaign to have countries withdraw recognition of an independent Kosovo, but for the Albanians it would be critical as Belgrade has been highly successful. It is for this reason that Kosovo's biggest opposition party, Vetëvendosje, accused Thaçi of going against Kosovo's interests by suspending the membership process to join international organizations, especially at a time when more and more countries are withdrawing their recognition of an independent Kosovo.

Even though Vučić has suspicions about the sincerity of Kosovo's halt on joining international organizations, demonstrating that Serbia does not trust Washington's assurances, Belgrade is fully prepared to continue its successful campaign of derecognition

in the event of Pristina withdrawing on their word.

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