

# MEPs divided over controversial Kosovo report

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EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - With the final round of negotiations on the future of Kosovo about to kick off in Vienna on Wednesday (21 February), the European Parliament - striving to enter the diplomatic arena - is indicating it may take a clear pro-independence stance.

A report drafted by Dutch green MEP Joost Lagendijk states that the European Parliament "supports the view that Kosovo should be granted independence and that its sovereignty should, over a period of time, be limited by an international presence."



Such a prospect is seen by Mr Lagendijk' draft report as "the only sustainable settlement" given that "independence will grant Kosovo access to international financial organizations and allow it realize its European prospects" while "limited sovereignty under international monitoring is necessary in order to maintain the multi-ethnic character of Kosovo and to safeguard the interest and security of the Serb population and of other ethnic minorities

But the text - the strongest expression of EU pro-independence feeling yet - has led to an internal struggle in the European Parliament, with many MEPs asking whether it is wise to be so blunt vis-a-vis Serbia

In response, the Dutch MEP himself has signalled a willingness to re-phrase the controversial document so that "the diplomatic process is not disrupted and the report is endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the parliament

I am aware that my wording is extremely unpopular in Belgrade," Mr Lagendijk told EUobserver, while "stressing that "the phrase reflects the opinion of the majority of MEPs at the time the report was drafted

Mr Lagendijk voiced full support for UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari's draft blueprint on Kosovo that puts the UN-administered province on the road to statehood

The main difference between Mr Ahtisaari's report and mine is that he [Martti Ahtisaari] does not call it "independence and I do," Mr Lagendijk said

The report is scheduled for a vote in the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs on 13 March

## **Trade-off hopes frozen**

Meanwhile, Serbian diplomats have reportedly signalled to the West that they would be willing to accept Kosovo's independence, but only after the Serb annexation of its northern part, mainly populated by ethnic Serbs

According to Balkans agency DTT-NET.COM and local Kosovo media, Belgrade diplomats have quietly told western counterparts the partition deal could fly, even though it would see Kosovo become 18 percent smaller in land area terms

But NATO chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer quickly poured cold water on such ideas on Friday (16 February), emphasizing the need to retain the unity and territorial integrity of Kosovo and rejecting the notion of partition

At the same time, the trade-off idea was rejected by some moderate Serb politicians in Kosovo, with one, Oliver Ivanovic, saying that division would lead to a displacement of Serbs from the central and east part towards the north

Meanwhile, tension is mounting on the ground. Two explosions hit Kosovo over the weekend - one in the capital city of Pristina and the other in northern municipality of Zubin Potok. There were no injuries in either incident, DTT-NET.COM reported