



Appeal of the Empirica Advocacy Platform: The tax increase threatens to endanger regional stability

Members of the Empirica Advocacy Platform – civil society organizations who are signatories of this statement, wish to express their deep concern regarding recent initiatives and decisions introduced by Kosovo authorities that target the traffic of goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These decisions run counter to requirements defined by the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the contractual obligations of the Agreement on Stabilization and Association. Moreover, we are witness to the fact these unilateral actions contribute to a further worsening of security conditions in Kosovo, which pose a threat to the hard-won peace and take us ever-further from the dialogue process and normalization of relations.

What poses particular concern is the instability, uncertainty and fear that current pervades local communities throughout Kosovo, both in the north as well as in Serbian-majority municipalities south of the Ibar. This has the potential to contribute to further destabilization and a deterioration in inter-ethnic relations. These recent developments can negatively affect questions of personal and collective security, freedom of movement as well as the rights and respect afforded to all communities in Kosovo.

Bearing in mind the complexities in the relationship between high officials in Pristina and Belgrade, as well as the recently violated Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), we call on the Government of Kosovo to reverse their decision on the imposition of 100% taxes without delay. By doing this, they would demonstrate their readiness to remedy this crisis and undertake accountability for the reduction in tensions between majority and non-majority communities in Kosovo. We furthermore call for the restraint and responsible behavior of all relevant institutions and for the return to a policy of uncompromising respect for the laws that protect the rights of the Serbian and other non-majority communities in Kosovo.

Likewise, we appeal to government representatives in Pristina and Belgrade to maximize their efforts to reduce current tensions and to take decisive steps towards the continuation of the interrupted dialogue. The alternative to this is a deterioration of the current situation that will invariably lead to a worsening of inter-ethnic relations and opens the possibility of renewed conflict between deeply divided communities in Kosovo.



At the same time, we also appeal to the international community, namely the European Union and members of the 'quintet' group, to greatly increase their efforts to reduce these newly-sparked tensions. We ask that they do this through actively contributing to the re-invigoration of the dialogue process between Pristina and Belgrade and to ensure, through diplomatic efforts, the consistent application of agreements reached within the framework of the Brussels dialogue. Insistence on a return to dialogue and the effective implementation of the Brussels Agreement should constitute an absolute priority for all parties involved in this process and those same actors must contribute, through concrete steps, to a easing of tensions and the establishment of trust between communities in Kosovo.

Signatories:

NGO Aktiv
NGO Communication for Social Development - CSD
NGO Network for Civic Activism
NGO Human Center Mitrovica
NGO Forum for Development and Multiethnic Collaboration - FDMC
NGO Advocacy Centre for Democratic Culture - ACDC
NGO Center for the Rights of Minority Communities- CRMC