



Kosovo 1 year on: EU Special Representative Pieter Feith interviewed

Working as an EU diplomat on Darfur and Iraq has given Pieter Feith plenty of experience for his current role as EU Special Representative to Kosovo. The former Dutch diplomat has to try and reconcile the wishes of the majority Albanians with the minority Serbs in Kosovo. As its 2 million people mark one year of fledgling independence from Belgrade we spoke to Pieter Feith.

In February last year the European Parliament passed a resolution vowing to assist the Kosovo authorities in developing a "stable, viable, peaceful and multi-ethnic society in Kosovo".

Formally recognised by 54 UN states, questions still remain over the key nations which refuse to recognise Kosovo's autonomy, and ultimately its status amongst the UN. The opposition of Russia has been a notable feature of its painful emergence.

Mr Feith, participated last week in a meeting of the Parliament's External Affairs committee, stressing key targets for this country.

You have said that "there is no alternative to a multiethnic society". How true is this in Kosovo

We are making progress but there is more work to be done. It is a long-term effort of reconciliation, and it is not being helped at present by the regional context.

There is still a political debate about the legality of Kosovo which doesn't help, but I see more and more readiness and willingness from the communities, including the Serb community, to step forward and work with the central institutions in Kosovo.

How do you work to improve the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade?

I have no particular responsibility in this dialogue, but I would like to note that the EU would like to see both Belgrade and Pristina start work on practical issues, cross-border issues, because we see this is part of the European perspective that has been granted to both countries.

Five European countries have not recognised the independence of Kosovo. Why should they recognise Kosovo?

There are at least two important decisions to which all the 27 Member States have joined: one of them is the deployment of the EULEX (The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo) mission with a key task of fighting corruption and organised crime. That's a border crossing issue, so you will see EULEX working with the authorities in

Belgrade and Pristina.

The European Union is available to facilitate any further contacts between Belgrade and Pristina.

Could Serbia and Kosovo become EU members?

This is not a matter of membership at this stage. I think all EU members are keen to see stability maintained. The perspective has been granted in the Thessaloniki summit in 2003, so that has to move forward. I think there is no real dispute on that.

Last year the EU's office in Pristina found it difficult to establish an official dialogue with the Serbian minority. How far have things progressed?

We are making progress, we have a round table format in which a number of key Kosovo Serb representatives are joining together with members of the government to discuss practical issues related to health, education, decentralisation and preserving the cultural and religious heritage of Kosovo. I think that is an encouraging step forward.