

**Over title:** Interview of Minister of the Local Government Administration, Mr. Sadri Ferati

**Subject:** Decentralization in the North is postponed for later

**Sub title:** “Decentralization in the North is a problem, because we have an insecure environment with a terrible deficit of the Rule of Law”, has said Minister Ferati

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**Prishtina, 21 May** – Started many years ago, the process of decentralization continues to be a challenge for the Government, especially for the Ministry of Local Government Administration, led by LDK minister, Mr. Sadri Ferati. This process that is evaluated by the local leaders as a painful compromise for Kosova, for a period of time could not be implemented in the Northern Mitrovica until there will not rule the law. This is said in an interview for “Koha Ditore” by Minister Sadri Ferati. Even though the latter warns that an office of Preparatory Team for the establishment of Mitrovica municipality will be opened in the North, at the same time he says that this will occur when the Institutions of Security will offer a safe environment for whole that part. Minister Ferati shows that the division of border between Prishtina and Gracanica will take more time, and that he has required from the new Serbian municipalities, to review their statutes and also to include in them the name of the Republic of Kosova. He has warned that Kosova during next year will have more than 38 municipalities, as it has currently.

In what kind of stage has decentralization process reached?

Ferati: The decentralization process was not easy, but after a general mobilization to treat this project in correct manner and by the support of the Inter-ministerial group and in coordination with ICO and with the support of Kosovar society was seen that thanks to this, the process of decentralization has marked a successful stage. This stage is the transfer of competencies from municipalities, holding of elections, the establishment of municipalities and now we are on the eve of the second phase and in the process of creating the new municipality of Partesh, and that the issue of Mitrovica will take a longer time.

Will it continue to be the problem, the persuasion of Serbian community to participate in this process?

Ferati: It has not been easy. Initially, we have contacted with different persons and the greatest problem has been to keep contacts with citizens. To be honest, afterward everything has gone well, because we offer a project with the enhanced competencies, strong autonomy, how citizens to manage with their assets and to improve their quality of life. Our project provides a common perspective and exactly this quality of the project have facilitated the work and everything has gone well until now.

Have you identified the persons with whom you will contact about the issue of North?

Ferati: We have made a probationary test for the North, by organizing two conferences, where a considerable number of Serbian citizens and other groups of interest have participated and we have noticed that the citizens there are not informed about this process. We have previously stated that, if preconditions would be created to continue our project there, we would continue but the issue of North is a big problem because, there we have a unsafe environment, with the deficit of the Rule of Law and precisely trying to protect these people, we are not ready to go in that part and organize direct meetings with citizens, because the citizen is endangered there.

When are expected to occur these meetings with citizens?

Ditore: I would not give a limited answer, because if I would have known, when EULEX will establish strong capacities in that part, when Kosova Police will be strengthened, when the courts will be installed, when the custom points will be regulated, with a word when the law will be set, then will be easier for me to give an answer to that question that 'when we will realize our project there, so that there are many reasons that I do not want to speculate about the deadline.

According to what you said, means that decentralization in the North does not depend on the local institutions?

Ferati: The decentralization there does not only depend on MLGA but in the rule of law. Then, except the competencies for establishment of new municipalities in Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok, we should create other mechanisms to make our project much more interesting, because it is not to our project's benefit, only the establishment of a municipality in the Northern Mitrovica and strengthening of the local institutions in that part, but for them in order to benefit from governmental grants and from the donor partners. Parallel to this, would be socio-economic development and the establishment of a European perspective, whose mission is opening of European house, led by ambassador Giffon. It aims, to promote more the idea of European perspective, EULEX and that the Kosova Police and that others should make the rule of law, whereas we through the donors' funds should work on creating of the socio-economic fund and as close responsibility of MLGA, through the Preparatory Teams to create there a stable place, where the citizen equality will be evaluated and to increase citizens confidence that we may announce elections there and that there will be a political and administrative structure that will serve to all citizens, without distinction.

What has done the Preparatory team so far for decentralization in the North?

Ferati: We have a Preparatory Team there. Now, we have closed the vacancy announcement for opening of MLGA office there, which will have 5-6 persons. Where, the office will be located, in the north or in the south is less important, we have not yet decided about this. However we have a decision, that the office of Preparatory Team will be located in the north, where will be easier for us to work and we can not deny in any

moment the real situation on the ground, and that we can not leave people in such situation. We will make assessments that in which area, their work will be easier.

Does MLGA have the strategy for parallel structures, in the North?

Ferati: Truly, an improvisation exists that a municipality is there, which does not aim to provide services to citizens, but it rather aims to be a kind of conductor of Belgrade's daily politics and as such is illegal and not profitable. It is clear, that they have their own problems. Seems that on May, they will hold extraordinary elections, it seems that they have not done anything but the most important thing is that, the Serbian citizens are more interested to cooperate with us in establishing a powerful and legal municipality. This is a tendency of Belgrade, to delay our processes, not to help Serbian citizens of that part that really want, to change the actual situation there, because they are very disappointed with the parallel structures, which have failed in solving their problems . I feel sorry, for citizens of the municipality of Zubin-Potok, Leposaviq and Zveçan , because they have agreed to cooperate with us but in the other hand the Belgrade will interrupt their salaries What is your answer in this case?

Ferati: I have no answer in these cases, because we still do not have a physical access to create a municipality, where citizen will have its own services and then he may thank Belgrade, for its support but now Kosovars have taken the country in their hands and all citizens are equal, so you may continue to support us, as Tirana is supporting Gracanica.

Let's go back again to the new municipalities. Which is the reason that even after six months of establishment, they are still working in private houses?

Ferati: Currently we are in temporary buildings for which we pay a rent. This is happening because municipalities were not established earlier, but they will be done. European Commission will select soon the company that will start with the construction of municipal buildings in 5-6 municipalities and three of them will be: Gracanica, Klokot and Ranilug.

Does this mean that municipal buildings will be ready this year?

Ferati: They will start this year, but I don't believe that a modern and large building may be finalized within this year.

It is known that the Government of Kosovo has established the new municipalities, but those municipalities do not mention the Republic of Kosovo in their statutes, where they do belong. This was even noticed also in their symbols, as it was the case with the Municipality of Gracanica. Have you asked explanations from those Mayors?

Ferati: Not only to Gracanica, but we have other cases as well. We have sent motions that the symbols of municipalities shall be in conformity with the law. Gracanica has sent back the motion and has shown the will that in the first meeting of the Municipal

Assembly that will be held to re-establish the symbol of the municipality for review and will take a decision in conformity with the Law on Local Self-Government.

Decentralization foresees also the division of municipal boundaries, what is happening in this aspect?

Ferati: The respective commission from the Kosovo Cadastral Agency is established, from the representatives of the new municipality for each case. Cadastral zones are known based on the package and only the formal statement will be done and to give all the maps to be stated officially and this issue is already an issue of signing of memorandums. But this has not ended only to the Municipality of Gracanica because a cadastral zone should be cut and there will be work to be done, whereas the others are all right. The situation in Gracanica shall be seen in field and the officials of the two municipalities are working in this aspect.

Does decentralization continue to be a painful compromise for Kosovo Albanians?

Ferati: The lack of our physical access in all the territory of Kosovo is painful, but decentralization as a process is not painful. For instance in Macedonia, 120 municipalities were established after a conflict, but by passing time there remain only 80 municipalities because they saw that the establishment of municipalities does not solve the problems of citizens if it does not provide services. We have politicized this issue a lot, otherwise the definition is very simple, a right that the citizen possesses in centre he is provided to realize it in his municipality.

This process allows Belgrade to assist Serbian municipalities. How will you control those aids when it is known that since some years Kosovo institutions have not had access in the aids provided by Serbia?

Ferati: This is an abnormal situation; because it is happening what is shouldn't happen, because it is increasing our burdens, whereas it is cutting the perspective of the citizens. It is the right of each municipality of Kosovo to have relations and partnership with each municipality and we, as MLGA are obliged to control these co operations in those fields where they are responsible, whereas the flow of the assistance should go through the Treasury of Kosovo. It can get and give assistance, but the information of the central institutions.

Do you have any information that Serbian municipalities are being funded by Belgrade?

Ferati: We don't have information that they have been funded, but we have complaints from the Mayors of Serbian municipalities that the declared investments from the Serbian Government in these new municipalities will not be done through them but through the parallel structures functioning in those municipalities.

Will decentralization terminate only with the establishment of these municipalities?

Ferati: In general, this has been the first phase of decentralization and in 2011 we will do an analysis of this process up to now, we will learn what we have to learn, we will change what we have to change without affecting the essence, regulating the process in a better manner and then the process will be open for all Kosovo citizens. But we will be very careful not to create municipalities only for form, but to create municipalities that will have development capacity. There will be standards on which they will be built and the number of municipalities will not be 38, it will be added and this is a proof of what we have said that decentralization is not a process committed only to one community. We have been obliged to establish five plus one municipality, but nobody stops us to create 50 more municipalities.

The most powerful voice against decentralization continues to be the movement “Vetëvendosje”. Is this movement correct in their evaluations for this process?

Ferati: Not only “Vetëvendosja”, but all citizens of the Republic of Kosovo look forward will huge interest how the progress in north will be developed and I don’t think it’s not common to see that process with dilemmas. If we show awareness that the processes there should not be delayed, Belgrade lastly will understand that it’s not his right, on the contrary it is a continuance of an old refrain to use the citizen there for its political purposes. Thus, if this is the essence, I think it is right, because we are not safe yet from the danger of Belgrade to untune that part there. But we still do not see a clearance of the international community on relation to Belgrade regarded this issue, because as there is an idea created that we have democratic government, after a week through another declaration can be seen the contrary.

Why the elected Mayors in the local elections of November also in Zubin-Potok, Zvecan and Leposaviq cannot exercise their positions?

Ferati: Actually it wasn’t expected for those municipalities to function with 30 votes, all of one community and this wasn’t our ambition to create a parallelism of the parallelism existing there. Our idea was that citizens go for elections and to install a credible structure which would change the current situation. But I will say that we didn’t have free elections there because of the lack of rule of law. We have had there a movable vehicle for voting and it was insulting. We have done an improvisation just to justify ourselves and this has been too harmful. And, if it wasn’t done yesterday, we should do it tomorrow and to ensure places for voting in schools as we have done throughout Kosovo. We are ready to hold elections there, but we expect safe environment which shall be ensured by the Police and KFOR.