

CONTACT GROUP MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

New York City -- September 20, 2006

Contact Group Ministers, together with the European Union High Representative, the European Union Presidency, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, the NATO Secretary General, UN officials including the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Kosovo, and UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari met on September 20 in New York to discuss the Kosovo future status process.

As this process enters a crucial stage, Ministers look forward to a durable solution to the last major issue related to the breakup of Yugoslavia. This would significantly enhance regional stability. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment that all possible efforts be made to achieve a negotiated settlement in the course of 2006.

Ministers recall that the Kosovo status process is based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and that the Security Council and the Contact Group will continue to play key roles. Ministers express their deep appreciation to the UN Special Envoy for conducting eight months of intensive negotiations. They urge the parties to respect the UN process and work constructively under the guidance of the Special Envoy to bridge the gaps between the parties' positions. The Contact Group will monitor closely the extent of constructive engagement from both parties and will draw conclusions accordingly.

Regarding Kosovo's political status, Ministers recognize that distance remains between the positions of Belgrade and Pristina, as was made clear at the high-level meeting in Vienna on 24 July. Ministers support the Special Envoy's efforts to work with the parties in cooperation with the Contact Group to arrive at a realistic outcome that enhances regional stability, is acceptable to the people of Kosovo and preserves Kosovo's multi-ethnic character. Striving for a negotiated settlement should not obscure the fact that neither party can unilaterally block the status process from advancing. Ministers encouraged the Special Envoy to prepare a comprehensive proposal for a status settlement and on this basis to engage the parties in moving the negotiating process forward.

Ministers urge Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and leaders of all of Kosovo's communities to accelerate efforts to implement UN-endorsed Standards, promote reconciliation and build trust among ethnic communities. The implementation of the Standards must continue during the status process and will be a factor in determining progress. They renew their call on Belgrade to cease its obstruction of Kosovo Serb participation in Kosovo's institutions.

Ministers welcome the ongoing efforts to prepare for the implementation of a settlement, including through a continued military presence to provide a safe and secure environment, and an international civilian presence to supervise implementation of and ensure compliance with the settlement.