

## **HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE FUTURE STATUS OF KOSOVO**

### **Contact Group statement (24 July, 2006), Vienna**

The Contact Group, EU and NATO observed the first round of direct talks on Kosovo's status in Vienna on 24 July 2006, under the auspices of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. President Boris Tadic and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica represented Belgrade; the Team of Unity, led by President Fatmir Sejdiu, represented Pristina. Today's meeting was an important step in the process of resolving this key issue.

The Contact Group reaffirms its commitment to the status process envisaged in UNSCR 1244, to the Guiding Principles and to the position set out in the 31 January Ministerial Statement. The Contact Group thanks President Ahtisaari and his team for their commitment to and leadership of the status process, and supports his decision to move to this next important phase, which we believe should lead to the development of a comprehensive proposal for a status settlement. We commend both parties for their willingness to discuss directly the key status issue, and look forward to constructive engagement, flexibility and willingness on both sides to reach realistic compromise-based solutions. We welcome the continuation, in parallel with the status talks, of negotiations on the protection of religious heritage sites, decentralisation and economic issues, and underline the importance of broadening the agenda to other key issues such as community protection measures.

The Contact Group commends the UN Special Envoy's efforts to develop proposals which would provide a strong basis for a democratic, multi-ethnic Kosovo in which the rights of all citizens are fully protected. It is in the interests of both Belgrade and Pristina to listen thoughtfully to each other's proposals and find realistic common ground. In this context the Contact Group shares President Ahtisaari's view that both sides need to do more in all aspects of the process in order to achieve this goal.

The Contact Group notes that Pristina has shown flexibility in the decentralisation talks. However, Pristina will need to be even more forthcoming on many issues before the status process can be brought to a successful conclusion. We also emphasise the need for further progress in implementing standards.

Belgrade needs to demonstrate much greater flexibility in the talks than it has done so far. Belgrade needs to begin considering reasonable and workable compromises for many of the issues under discussion, particularly decentralisation. The Contact Group renews its call on Belgrade to cease obstruction of Kosovo-Serb participation in Kosovo's institutions, in which

Kosovo-Serbs can most effectively advocate their interests; to reverse the directive on salaries; and to hand over cadastral records.

One of the central aims of the international community is to create conditions in Kosovo where all communities can live in a multi-ethnic society. In order to be able to create these conditions, the full support of Serbia is of vital importance. The Contact Group notes with concern the situation in northern Kosovo, in particular the move in three municipalities to break ties with the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG), and reports of personnel increases in illegal parallel security structures. We call upon both communities to exercise restraint and mutual understanding at this sensitive stage of the negotiations and to cooperate fully with UNMIK, KFOR and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) in their work to provide a secure environment in all parts of Kosovo. In this context we welcome NATO's deployment of additional forces into northern Kosovo. There will be no partition of Kosovo or other arrangements that would create new divisions.

The Contact Group reaffirms that all possible efforts should be made to achieve a negotiated settlement in the course of 2006 that is, inter alia, acceptable to the people of Kosovo and promotes a multi-ethnic society with a future for all of its citizens. As set out in the Guiding Principles, once negotiations are underway, they can not be allowed to be blocked. The process must be brought to a close, not least to minimise the destabilising political and economic effects of continuing uncertainty over Kosovo's future status. The Contact Group will monitor the extent of constructive engagement on the part of both parties, and will draw conclusions accordingly.

We firmly believe that a status settlement in Kosovo will enhance regional stability and pave the way for the European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives for Serbia, Kosovo and the region as a whole. We reaffirm the international community's willingness to establish appropriate international structures, to be endorsed by the UN Security Council, in order to help ensure implementation of and compliance with the status settlement's provisions in a safe and secure environment. The Contact Group stands ready to assist with the implementation of a new international office that would be responsible for supporting and supervising the implementation of the status settlement. We welcome initial planning underway within NATO for the continuation of the international military presence in Kosovo following a status settlement. Equally, we welcome planning activities underway within the EU to determine the EU's role after the status settlement, in particular through a robust policing and rule of law mission, and the practical means to realise Kosovo's European perspective.