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Press Briefing by UN Deputy Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo Albert Rohan

Good Morning ladies and Gentlemen

This is our second visit to Pristina after a couple of weeks and the purpose is really to continue the talks we had with Mr Ahtisaari and to deepen the discussion on some of the issues. We had meetings with our colleagues from UNMIK, with the Principle Deputy SRSR Rossin and his colleagues, we had meeting with all the members of the Kosovo Negotiating Team, with representatives of the Serbian Community, and also with representatives of the civil society. As I said, the purpose was to get a deeper knowledge of the problems involved, to advance our discussions with the Negotiating Team on certain issues, All this is part already of the status process and we shall continue it of course next year.

Before the holiday we will still have to go to New York with Mr Ahtisaari to speak to the Secretary General and have other meetings in the US. And then Christmas comes and New Year and then we will fully establish our offices. We already have our offices in Vienna but we will move into new offices in the centre of the town, which are provided by the Austrian government. And then also our staff will be consolidated at the beginning of next year. I personally shall remain in Vienna during the holidays, so I am always available if need be for further discussions, further work. And, when will be we shall see, I am sure that the Special Envoy Mr Ahtisaari will visit Pristina some time in January again. We will have meetings we'll have meetings in Vienna and see then how it goes.

During my talks I also transmitted certain messages on how we see the negotiating process. One of the messages went to the Kosovo Albanian side that we know their aspirations and the status will not come automatically. Much work has to be done. Much work has to be done in the terms of certain standards, in particular the rule of law, functioning institutions, the respect for human rights, protection of minorities' rights, the issue of decentralisation and also the economy because this is an essential part for the future of Kosovo. And I also pointed that what is extremely important is how the international community perceives the Kosovo society because, ultimately, any settlement must be approved by the international community in the form of the Security Council. And one has to keep always in mind that the members of the Security Council. We are maintaining close contacts though the Contact Group – The Contact Group is a

very important Group in this context - but the Security Council will have to approve whatever result the negotiations may give.

Of course, the protection of the ethnic groups is one of the essential aspects for any settlement. I appealed to the Kosovo Albanian majority representatives to reach out to the other communities, in particular the Serbian community. The Kosovo Albanians are in a strong majority here. They are in a strong position. So they must reach out to the minorities.

I appealed also to the representatives of the Kosovo Serbian side they must accept to accept to participate, to cooperate in shaping the future of Kosovo if they want to have – and we want them to have – a future in Kosovo. We want to facilitate this, to guarantee this, but they must also participate in shaping the future of Kosovo

We discussed the decentralisation issue. There must a system of local Government, which is both functional, financially viable and which will satisfy also the various ethnic communities. We support the efforts by the Government here, the Negotiating Team, by the working groups here, particularly also the contact with the consultative council for the minority communities to prepare common positions which would then flow into any settlement.

One important aspect, which I also pointed out, is the security. Security must be improved. We condemn any violence of any kind and I want to point it out that violence is totally counterproductive. Apart from the fact that we have to condemn every kind of violence, it would make it much more difficult for Kosovo to fulfil its aspirations if violence would occur here again.

And finally we have discussed with the civil society, their representatives, because we consider NGO really essential for a civilized society. Their role is very important and they are prepared also to work on various aspects of the status and also make their contribution and this is highly welcome.

This afternoon, we are leaving Kosovo, we are driving to Belgrade and we'll have discussions there on similar lines as here. Thank you.

Questions/Answers

Q (AP) Did you also tell (your interlocutors) how the further talk will go. How is this happening. You said it will not last only two day. But will it last one and a half year?

Albert Rohan: You are talking about how long the process will last. It is already happening. As I said, the visit of Mr Ahtisaari here a couple of weeks ago, mine now, is the beginning and part of the process. Mr Ahtisaari point out last time: our approach is to discuss concrete issues, you know, like rule of law, returns, property *{one word inaudible}*, decentralization, protection of cultural heritage. We want to discuss concrete

problems, try to find common solutions if possible on areas where there are differences, either discussing it with the parties separately or in direct talks. I mean here the working groups are direct talks on technical matters. The Vienna talks on decentralisation were already direct talks and this will be continued. So, whatever seems conducive, whatever system we will apply. And we hope then to get common ground, which will form the basis for a settlement.

Q (BBC) Mr Rohan, these two visits you and Mr Ahtisaari in Kosovo seem to be a bit relaxing. You have relaxing messages for the Kosovans, especially for their leaders. When do you expect to have more tougher messages for the Kosovans ?

Albert Rohan: I do not know what you understand by “tough” but I do not think our message could be much tougher that it was. When we tell them that a solution will not fall from Heaven and they have to really to pull up their socks and start to work. And we discussed the issues. And they were very receptive on it. And the same we do with the Kosovo Serbs for example this year. We tell them: we want you to have a future in Kosovo but if you want to have one, you have to participate in shaping it. So participate, come to the working group, tell your positions. And in Belgrade of course we will have similar messages. So I do not think... Certainly for me it was *not* relaxing.

Q on whether Mr Rohan was satisfied with this visit and the discussions, and specifically on the question on decentralisation)

Albert Rohan: Well, I cannot say whether I am satisfied or not satisfied because it is a work in progress. And we still have to..., I did not hear any final positions of either side, because they themselves are still working out concrete proposals. I think that there are several aspects to this decentralisation problem. There is the question of what competences do you devolve to municipalities, which makes sense because one of our principles is : we are only to support a solution which is sensible, which is functional. So, what competences can reasonably be [*inaudible?*] on the municipal level? And this they should get. The second is: how do we delimitate the borders of the municipalities? Because I understand that from the side of the Serbian community there is a desire to create a number of municipalities so that a Serbian majority is guaranteed in a limited number of municipalities. Fine, but you cannot endlessly increase the number of the municipalities because it would be totally dysfunctional. And this brings me to the third aspect: It must be also financially viable because to devolve competences to the local level means additional expenses, which have to be paid. As long as they are reasonable, it is fine. But we cannot increase endlessly the number of municipalities. We have seen this in Macedonia where they did it at first and then reduced the number of municipalities again. The fourth aspect is how do you arrange it that the municipalities who wish to have for example some links with other municipalities. How can they do in a practical way and also in a way that it does not mean any kind of division or something like that? This is not really what we want. But there are possibilities and they can be very useful. But these are some of the issues - there may be others - which will have to be addressed and I understand that both sides are now working on that proposals and we are also doing some thinking about this.

Q (Reuters) When do you expect for the two sides to enter a dialogue, a political dialogue?

Albert Rohan: I do not really understand what you mean by “political dialogue”. But we want to have some time - and both parties expressed their readiness to do so - direct talks on decentralisation at the ministerial level. This will probably take place in January, whenever the parties are ready. And these are already direct talks at a political level. At what time the highest team we get together I do not know. This will depend. As soon as there is readiness of the parties, as soon as there is some kind of common ground so they know what they are discussing, we will do it.

Q : Mr Rohan, from the talks you had here in Pristina, and talks you had before with Belgrade, how do you see which side can move from their positions: Albanians from Independence, and Serbia from their positions ?

Albert Rohan: If one wants to have an agreed solution and agreed settlement that gets out of our hands, then obviously both sides will have to move. There are certain basic positions, which may be difficult to give up by parties, but as I said before, neither side will have a solution they will be enthusiastic about. And this is in the nature of compromise. But what it will be really I cannot tell you.

Q (Associated Press). Question on the Eu and the integration of the Balkan region in Europe. On incentives to get Kosovo and Serbia in some way towards the European Union in some future. What can you offer to Kosovo, Serbia, or Montenegro to this matter ?

Albert Rohan: Can I tell you: we are not Father Christmas ! We are not coming with a big and offer a bit to the ones or the others. We are facilitators in a process, where two conflicting positions must be got in line. This is the basics analysis of what we are doing. But you are right in something else: that the European context is extremely important. And I personally have taken the line publicly very often in the last few months, repeatedly, that it is Europe’s task to help stabilize the Balkan region, particularly it has failed in the nineties to prevent the war connected to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. So we have a duty. And it is also in our own interest, because it is the last region in Europe where there is instability. So we have to contribute to stabilize it. And there is an enormous chance to do it because we have this instrument, which is called the European perspective, which in fact is the membership. And in spite of what is happening now - and I’ll come to it in a second – the goal of membership for every country in the region in the European Union was very clearly established three years ago in Thessaloniki. And what I know from the Austrian presidency next half year: they want to devote that presidency to this region here. The South-East European region will be their main priority. And for instance, what is planned is that on many of the informal contacts of ministers – Foreign ministers, Justice ministers, Education ministers, Interior ministers - the colleagues from the Balkans may be invited to participate to discuss together the common problems. So that means that there are efforts towards the [*inaudible*] options

are going to include this region in the deliberations of the European union. And also it is their intention to reaffirm the Thessaloniki goal of membership for all countries. Now, having said this, it is all too known that the European Union is in a crisis. And this moment is not very conducive for even thinking about new enlargement. And this what you mentioned with the problem of Macedonia. But I would venture to say that the majority of the EU countries are in favour of giving Macedonia the candidate's status. It is only a small minority who hesitate. And it is not a thing, which is decided forever. Those countries who wanted [*oppose?*] the signal to the region. We will continue to work for it. And my country [*inaudible*]. But it is true that, because of the referendums in France and in the Netherlands on the Constitution, because of the dispute on the budget, the efforts of the present presidency to reduce the budget, the times are not extremely conducive for talks about new enlargement. But the EU always said that is in balance. And I would consider this hopefully as temporary down and this will come up again pretty soon.

Q (BBC Albania) When we speak about the decentralization process in Kosovo, do we speak, do we talk about it regardless of the arrangement on the political status? Or is this a process that will take place in an independent country or in association with other countries? How do you see this process to go forward?

Albert Rohan: this clearly will be part of the settlement. There are no consecutive things but there are certain technical things which have to be discussed and - I mean: the competences for instance of municipalities really do not depend entirely on the status – Certain things are reasonable even in my country to [*not clear*] on the municipal level. So, I agree you can get only that far in these discussions, but there is enough scope to discuss technical aspects. But then the implementation I am sure will be part of the package.

Q (BBC Serbia), inaudible

Albert Rohan: Generally the answers were positive. The Albanians said that they are working on these areas and they will accelerate also the work on issues for the status process to formulate concrete proposals and at the same time, where it is their own prerogative, like to work for the rule of law and the [*inaudible?*] they will do it. I would agree, as everybody would say, that we have to see action. Well, this is nice, yes, and I appreciate that, but we need results. And this we will see in a couple of weeks. I think, on the Kosovo Serbian side, they understood the message. We know they are not in an easy position. And I hope they will reflect on what we have said. I hope really they will show up in some of the working groups because it is in their own interest. But again we will see when the working groups take place, whether the [Kosovo] Serbs will join in again.

[END]