

Statement by The Contact Group on The Future of Kosovo - London 31 January 2006
(31/01/06)

Contact Group Ministers together with the EU High Representative, the EU Presidency, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, the NATO Secretary-General and UN representatives including the UN Special Status Envoy and SRSG met on 31 January in London. Ministers express their profound regret over the loss of President Ibrahim Rugova, who had won the world's respect for his principled advocacy of human rights and democracy.

Ministers emphasise the importance they attach to a lasting Kosovo status settlement that promotes a multi-ethnic society. This would immeasurably enhance regional stability, as well as the European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives of Serbia, Kosovo and of the region as a whole. Ministers recall that the character of the Kosovo problem, shaped by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and consequent conflicts, ethnic cleansing and the events of 1999, and the extended period of international administration under UNSCR 1244, must be fully taken into account in settling Kosovo's status. UNSCR 1244 remains the framework for the ongoing status process, with the Security Council and Contact Group continuing to play key roles.

Ministers believe that all possible efforts should be made to achieve a negotiated settlement in the course of 2006. To this end, Ministers strongly support the work of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. They call on Belgrade and Pristina to work constructively with him to find realistic solutions to the many difficult issues that need to be addressed. These should include, inter alia, freedom of movement, transparent and constructive links between local communities in Serbia and Kosovo, mechanisms for resolving the fate of missing persons and a specific package of measures for the protection of religious communities and sites. Arrangements for good relations between Belgrade and Pristina and within the region must also be part of a settlement.

Ministers stress that effective provisions for the decentralisation of government will be crucial to the status settlement. Decentralisation can ensure that minority communities remain a vital part of Kosovo's future and give impetus to the return of displaced persons who should be able to choose where they live in Kosovo. Ministers call on the parties to engage seriously on this issue.

The Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, alongside all communities in Kosovo, must do much more to ensure that the UN Security Council-endorsed Standards are implemented. Their commitment is crucial to the prospects for a sustainable status settlement that enables all communities to live and thrive in safety. Ministers also call on Kosovo's Serbs and other minority communities to seize the opportunity of the status process to ensure their concerns are fully addressed.

The Contact Group Guiding Principles of November 2005 make clear that there should be: no return of Kosovo to the pre-1999 situation, no partition of Kosovo, and no union of

Kosovo with any or part of another country. Ministers re-state the international community's willingness to establish, for an interim period after a settlement, appropriate international civilian and military structures to help ensure compliance with the settlement's provisions. Day-to-day governance, which must be conducted on a multi-ethnic basis, should rest with Kosovo's duly-elected representatives. Ministers recall NATO's continuing commitment to maintain a safe and secure environment through KFOR.

Ministers look to Belgrade to bear in mind that the settlement needs, inter alia, to be acceptable to the people of Kosovo. The disastrous policies of the past lie at the heart of the current problems. Today, Belgrade's leaders bear important responsibilities in shaping what happens now and in the future. The Contact Group, the EU and NATO stand ready to support Serbian democratic forces in taking this opportunity to move Serbia forward. Ministers welcome the arrest of Jovo Djogo but reiterate that the leadership must fulfil their repeated pledges to co-operate fully with ICTY, notably in respect of Mladic and Karadzic. Ministers equally urge Pristina to recognise that a multi-ethnic settlement is the only workable option and that the more the vital interests of minorities are addressed the quicker a broadly acceptable agreement can be reached. Ministers warn those seeking to use violence that they will undermine their own cause.

Lastly, Ministers emphasise that a negotiated settlement is the best way forward. It will help to create the circumstances in which a settlement can be made to work for the benefit of all. Constructive engagement by the parties will also pave the way for a European and Euro-Atlantic future. Ministers urge leaders in Serbia and Kosovo to show the political courage and vision necessary to come forward with realistic and far-sighted proposals for the future of both Kosovo and Serbia. They have asked the Status Envoy and the SRSG to keep them updated on progress and undertake to return to the issue at their request or if the situation warrants.