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Press Briefing by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and his Deputy Albert Rohan after their first visit to Belgrade

Statement

Martti Ahtisaari: Let me tell you a little bit about the background of our mission here. We have been appointed by the Secretary-General slightly over a week ago, for me to become the Special Envoy for the future status talks on Kosovo. I have been asked by the Secretary-General to consult the members of the Security Council, the Contact Group members - which I met before coming here - relevant regional organizations, relevant regional actors and other key players. It is a very wide mandate to consult everyone who can contribute positively to this issue.

It is very important to recall that my activities are not to replace those of SRSG Søren Jessen-Petersen. My instructions are very clear. I will furthermore coordinate with the SRSG in Kosovo. The Special Envoy will use his leverage in support of the SRSG to ensure greater commitment and results from standards implementation. I repeat: our mission is not to replace the SRSG but to support his activities.

When it comes to the process' time frame, the Secretary-General notes that the pace and duration of the future status process will be determined by the Special Envoy on the basis of consultations with the Secretary-General, taking into account the cooperation of the parties and the situation on the ground.

When it comes to the outcome, the future status process will culminate into a political settlement that determines the future of Kosovo. It should, to the extent possible, address the practical questions related to the implementation of an eventual agreement for a possible international presence following such determination.

We have been in Kosovo before coming here. I was briefed by UNMIK and KFOR, I met the Kosovo Albanians, I met, I think, all the minority groups in that society, and we have had the opportunity to have meetings with PM Koštunica, Foreign Minister Drasković and President Tadić today. I also paid a courtesy call to his Holiness Patriarch Pavle.

In my discussions in Pristina and here, I have emphasized also the special role of the Contact Group. I'm sure you are all aware of the guiding principles that the CG has worked out.

I have emphasized that when we talk about future status, we talk about status with standards. As I said, my task is to support the SRSG in the further implementation of the standards.

We have discussed, in these meetings, the implementation of the standards, and I have emphasized that, when we talk about the standards in Kosovo, we need the action of the Kosovo Albanians, but we also need the support of all the minority population groups like the Serbs. I had a very good meeting with the Serb representatives in Kosovo. I also paid a visit in Decani to the Serb Orthodox monastery.

But I have emphasized also that, in order to move on these important issues, the Belgrade support for this process is also important. They can first of all encourage the Serb population in Kosovo to actively participate in the process of finding solutions for the issues that we are discussing.

I hope also that some of the materials that are available in Belgrade - and I understand that they are not available in Pristina at the moment - could be made available for UNMIK, like some of the archives dealing with the property issues and so on.

We have touched the issues of decentralization, the return of the people who have left Kosovo for one reason or another, their right to return back to Kosovo and also have the right to settle wherever they find it convenient for themselves. They have a right for that.

We have also discussed the issues of protection of cultural heritage and monasteries in that connection. The importance of maintaining security and law and order during this process that is supposed to lead to the future status in Kosovo.

This is the beginning of an exercise. I have emphasized that there is no time schedule fixed for our mandate. There seems to be different schools of thought: those who think that this would only take few months, those who say that it would last half a year, those who say that it will take a year, and there is a group of people who argue that there should be no deadline at all and that it will take what it takes.

When the international community has decided to move forward with the future status talks, it has already then decided that the present status quo can't continue for ever. We have to be aware of that and recognize that the guiding principles form an important frame of reference to our work.

We will proceed as expeditiously as possible. We received the marching orders from the Secretary-General slightly more than a week ago and here we are because we felt that we had to come as fast as possible in order to hear the main parties. I expect that we will be fully operational by the end of the year.

What we have emphasized is that it is important to get practical advance on the standards issues. There are already a few working groups that have met. We have urged those guys to continue that work. We are not trying to replace UNMIK in this task. If our facilitation is needed, we will of course be available. But the reporting on the standards is going to be carried out by UNMIK in the traditional manner it has been so far.

We have to try to show improvements in a practical manner in Kosovo, and therefore the cooperation of everybody is needed. This is the spirit in which we have been carrying out these discussions also here.

Questions and Answers :

Q: (BH1): You met President Tadić today. What do you think about suggestions contained in his plan?

Martti Ahtisaari: I had a very good meeting with President Tadić and we covered a lot of ground. I'm sure that he will be in the position to explain what he explained to me. I think you know the starting positions for these negotiations. I don't think that these have changed very much through these different meetings that I have had. I read before I came here about ideas the President has advanced. He did not go into those in our discussions. I think he also emphasized the issues of decentralization and how important they were and I think we agreed on the return of those who want to return, that we should work on that. I don't see any reason why I should be commenting his proposal, because we did not go into details. I would ask you to read once again the guiding principles the Contact Group provides – for a simple reason that you see a lot of guidance there, because this important group of countries gives sort of a framework for us to approach this. For instance, it says very clearly that we have first of all to see that the protection of minorities is done, that the partition is not to be accepted, etc...I don't want to repeat all the things that are in this document. I ask you to do your homework, as well.

Q (Vjekoslav Radovic, AR International): Have you noticed any discrepancies in the positions of President Tadić and PM Koštunica on the issue of the future status of Kosovo? I have one more question: Do you have any knowledge of a secret meeting between KFOR and the so-called Kosovo Independence Army, which was allegedly held and during which the KDI had decided to refrain from violence for the time being?

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all, I think it is fair to say that I did not hear a sort of repetition of what was said in the meeting with the Prime Minister and in those with the Foreign Minister and the President. Perhaps the best way to describe these meetings is that the Prime Minister explained the well-known position of the Government. I think there was emphasis and elaboration of these things in our discussions with the Foreign Minister and the President. No, I couldn't tell you that there were discrepancies between them, because the overall framework was provided by the Prime Minister and then we went much more in details, particularly with the Foreign Minister and also with the President. So, I think it was an elaboration of points made.

I'm not aware of any meeting that you referred to between KFOR and the militia group, so I can't comment on it. I did not come up in any of briefings and I have very full briefings from KFOR. I think you need to put that to UNMIK representatives. I did not hear anything of the sort.

Q (Walter Mueller, Swiss Radio): Where do you see K-Serbs during the negotiations? On the side of the Pristina delegation or on the side of the Belgrade delegation?

Martti Ahtisaari: Actually, it is not really up to me or to Albert Rohan to say which delegation they want to choose. They came as a group, not as a sort of unitary team representing unitary views when we had the meeting in Pristina. There were 12 people coming to see me, but I must say that I was very impressed that such a big group came. I understood that they represented different political organizations and had slightly different emphasis in their presentations when they saw me. It was no repetition of points of views, because I think that each and every of them spoke. I have also taken note... and I have not had the time to compare names of those who saw us and those who want to be included in the negotiating group. There maybe the same people there, but the choice is theirs. It is maybe up to you to draw the conclusions. It is none of my business.

Q (Zorka Djukanovic, BBC): Mr. Ahtisaari, at which moment will you assess that it is time to quit the negotiations with the two sides and move the process to the Security Council?

Martti Ahtisaari: I can hardly do it today, because I'm not a miracle maker and not a rainmaker, either. This is the first meeting and I had not been to the region for a very long time. I used to come here wearing different hats during the last five years. Therefore, it is very important for me to be able to establish these contacts. It is totally premature to start speculation on when I will draw the conclusion. First of all, I have to consult with the Secretary-General. I report to him. I should perhaps read what he gave me as an instruction and marching order. The Special Envoy will report directly to the Secretary-General. The Special Envoy will have the maximum leeway in order to undertake his task, but his expected to revert to the Secretary-General at all stages of the process. I think it is very much a standard guidance for any Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. He is the one to whom I will be reporting about my discussions in the end of this trip and also the one with whom I will be consulting on any future steps. We have barely started this exercise, so let's have patience. I have it at least.

Q (Slavisa Stojkovic, Radio Belgrade 1) : Mr. Ahtisaari, when do you expect that direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina might start? The second question is: what places both Belgrade and Pristina have in these talks, considering that all key answers will be given by those who neither come from Belgrade nor Pristina?

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all, we have offered our services, if needed, for organization of direct talks. On technical level they are already taking place and we have pushed those to continue. On the other issues, I hope there is willingness on both sides to meet and discuss the issues that are vital for this process. It is perhaps realistic to assume that since we are so late in the year, hopefully at the beginning of the new year we can get both parties together. We would definitely want to facilitate, if it is so decided by the parties, but I hope that the both parties will be participating. We are talking about talks that are not entirely technical as the ones that the four working groups are looking at separate technical issues. They need to move, as well, because, as I said, we need concrete practical results, but different levels of meetings are always welcome. Definitely our task is to encourage those direct contacts and, as I said, if a formal

chairmanship is required, my deputy and I are available along with our colleagues to facilitate.

Q (M. de Koning, Netherlands Press Association): I notice you spoke with the Serbian Church leaders. I was wondering why didn't you also speak with the Albanian religious leaders?

Martti Ahtisaari: I think there is a very simple explanation. If you look at the guidelines of the Contact Group, they specifically speak about this. I will quote from there. It refers to the paragraph 5 of the guiding principles: 'The settlement of the Kosovo status should include specific safeguards for the protection of cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo. This should include provisions specifying the status of Serbian Orthodox Church, institutions and sites and other patrimony in Kosovo. I think this is enough to explain why we wanted to see them and visit the monastery in Decani and why I saw his Holiness here in the city. It is not exclusive. We could not see everybody on this trip. There is a limit on how much you can do in a week. This is not in any way an exclusive list of people that we are going to see in the future. There are going to be a number of others that we need to talk to.

Q (Vesna Surbat, SRNA): Are you satisfied with your initial talks both here and in Pristina and do they in any way indicate a possible compromise?

Martti Ahtisaari: Yes, unequivocally yes, I am satisfied with my talks! I think that are fairly known positions that the parties have been elaborating. We have gathered an enormous amount of information this week. We have to sit down in Vienna and start analyzing our experiences from this week. We have hardly had any time to do it during this trip. I think it forms a good basis.

As to the second part of your question, let me put it this way: if we felt that this was totally hopeless task I don't think we would have volunteered. We never volunteered, I have to be clear on that, as well. I think we follow a good principle – never volunteer for the job, but never refuse one. I think that both of us felt the way that UN Secretary-General wanted to pursue with the backing of the international community for future status talks. It was our duty to drop everything else and start concentrating on this issue. We have no illusions that this is going to be extremely difficult. So far, no one has extended us congratulations for an easy task and I think that it is a recognition that this is a complicated one. Perhaps, it was the reason why it has taken a fair amount of time for the international community to come to this point and support the Secretary-General to move things forward.

I am also very pleased that the Contact Group gives clear support to our efforts, which is extremely important. Let's not forget that they are important member states of the UN and four permanent member of the SC. I just got a confirmation that I will be visiting Moscow the following week on Wednesday and Thursday to discuss the situation with the Foreign Minister Lavrov. We missed each other in New York. I was a bit late in coming there. I have been in Washington, in Brussels talked with the Council of Ministers already before my appointment and there will be a continuous flow of these consultations in other capitals that Albert and I will visit in the weeks to come.

Actually, this is a very much a preparatory phase of work and we try to touch base with everybody. There are requests from this region, as well. On this trip we could not do more than this, but later I do hope we shall have a chance to go back and consult those who have approached us already. Some people have also come out with their own ideas how this problem could be solved and, of course, we will study every piece of advice that has been given by different parties.