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## **Press Briefing by Mr Albert Rohan after the third direct talks on decentralization held in Vienna**

Ladies and Gentlemen, today we went with the two parties through the whole range of issues pertaining to the decentralization. Besides the general principles, we discussed again the competencies, including health care, education, social policies, etc. We discussed the financing of local government, including funding from Belgrade; inter-municipal relations, the question of consortia and associations of municipalities in conformity with the European Charter on local Self-Government. And finally we discussed the issue of cross-boundary cooperation, the question of the cooperation between municipalities in Kosovo and Belgrade”.

On a number of these issues, common grounds that we had found during the previous two rounds of discussions were confirmed. We have also established that there are considerable differences between the concepts of the two sides.

The concept of the Kosovo delegation is to have a system of decentralization that applies to all municipalities of Kosovo, that is mainly motivated by the desire of good government and that is more or less ethnically neutral, with of course the preparedness to addressing in some manner the aspirations of the various ethnic groups.

The concept of the Serbian side is more one of a large degree of autonomy for Kosovo-Serbs-majority municipalities with a limited role of central authorities. The Kosovo delegation puts a great accent on a very strong role on the Central Government, and on the Serbian side is institutionalized linkage with Belgrade.

All the various proposals which we got from the two sides in a way reflect these basic differences of view. It is not our role to accept or reject any proposals; it is the parties who have to accept or reject the proposals from the other sides. We shall now in the next few days receive additional inputs from the parties and these additional inputs will guide our future work.

The next issue we shall tackle is the question of the municipal boundaries, the issue of the creation of new Serbian-majority municipalities, including the question of Mitrovica. We have agreed that a team of our experts will go both top Belgrade to Pristina in the week of the 17<sup>th</sup> of April. Then, after the Easter holidays – there are a lot of holidays in the second half of April, which everybody wants to enjoy - once these holydays are over, we will have the next meeting here in Vienna on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, which will be dealing with this municipal boundary question.

At the same time, we shall continue our work on the protection of the religious sites of the Serb Orthodox Church. We had already two rounds of talks, both in Pristina and in Belgrade, both with the Governments and with the Church. We are going to establish some principles in a working paper that we are going to send to the parties in the next few days, outlining also the open questions that will have to be discussed and that eventually will have to be decided. We hope to be able to call for a Vienna meeting on this matters in early May.

The other question which we will be following up is the question of the minority rights in a general way. Here consultations are going to take place before we can call on a negotiation and a meeting here in Vienna.

And finally at the same time we are pursuing the economic matters, the question of assets, of liabilities, of property issues. Here there is a strong involvement of the European Union, but also of institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. Here we hope that a meeting in Vienna will be possible also in the course of May. So this is our work program for the next few weeks. Thank you.

## **Questions**

*Q: On a plan to have both parties agreeing on decentralization*

**Albert Rohan:** You see we don't have a plan really. We have established a paper which we sent to the parties last week, a week ago, which sets out those areas where we thought there would be an agreement or common ground and which was confirmed to us on some instances. And we made suggestions to endorse areas where there was either no agreement or where we didn't have discussion in substance yet. I cannot say who is closer. It doesn't really matter who is closer and who is less close, we have to get some kind of agreed formula and each side has rejected parts of our suggestions and accepted others.

*Q: On the pace of the negotiations*

**Albert Rohan:** No. The move is not slower, nor as slow, as fast as I did expect. You know, these are important matters for both sides. They have their positions. They have important consequences both from the Kosovo side and the Serbian side. It's totally legitimate that every party sticks to their position and there's nothing which is out of my expectations.

*Q: on what kind of proposal on the municipalities would be acceptable*

**Albert Rohan:** I am sorry again, the echo is so bad, if the question was what kind of proposals on the municipalities could we accept ?

*[same journalist, inaudible]*

**Albert Rohan:** Well our criteria very clear: if you create a new municipality it must be a viable composition, it must be functional and it must be sustainable. These are the three criteria which for me are the most important. We cannot establish fictitious municipalities. They cannot be too small, otherwise they cannot run their affairs and they are not affordable. So there must be a minimum of people living in a municipality, which goes well in the thousands. It must be fairly compact and people must live in an area which is contingent - we can't have a couple of hundreds here a couple of hundreds there. So functionality and sustainability are really the two criteria.

*Q: How would it be possible to achieve agreement on decentralization on May 4?*

**Albert Rohan:** Well, May 4<sup>th</sup> will not be destined for arriving at the concluding agreement the substance of decentralization, May 4<sup>th</sup> will be the question of the boundaries of the municipalities. It is the Serbs' wish - which we support - to create a number of new municipalities where the Serbs have the majority. I am thinking of a limited number simply because of the criteria I just mentioned. It is a very difficult procedure to delimitate these boundaries, but these are the issues we are going to discuss on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

*Q: Would you be ready to impose a solution on decentralization?*

**Albert Rohan:** Well I don't impose anything, nor does Mr. Ahtisaari. Our aim is to arrive to an agreed solution and we hope to be able to do this. If we are not able, then we'll report to the Security Council, or rather to the UN Secretary-General will report to the Security Council, and it's up to him to decide what to do. We have a mandate from the UN Secretary-General to arrive at a solution, hopefully an agreed solution.

*Q: You did not mention what you mentioned in the two previous meetings, that both sides were cooperative. Was it not the case this time?*

**Albert Rohan:** Well I wouldn't say that the delegations were not constructive. Certainly the atmosphere was a very friendly one and quite relaxed one, and I am sure that the delegations can confirm this. But it is true that the more you are going the depth of the substance, the more visible become the basic differences. Co-operation and constructiveness was available in our discussion, but that doesn't mean that you are able to overcome all these difficulties, which are real, and which we have to recognize.

Thank you very much we will have the delegations take place now.