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## **Statement by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Ferenc Somogyi of Hungary in Budapest**

*Following is the statement made by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Ferenc Somogyi of Hungary in Budapest today:*

**Martti Ahtisaari:** The Foreign Minister and I met in Salzburg when we discussed the Kosovo issue and the situation in the Balkans. I expressed the interest to come and see the Foreign minister here.

Your country has many things to offer. The government has come through, and the country has come through a reform process and it is vitally important, when we look at the countries in the Balkans, that they are looking for European dimension. I would like to emphasize that if the countries in the Balkans would not have a European dimension, it would be very difficult to carry out their work.

We are engaged, as I told the Minister, in technical discussions at the moment. We started from decentralization of administration because the decentralization of administration - in other words: giving more decision-making powers to the municipalities in the different regions of the country - is vitally important when we try to improve the governance and possibilities for people, particularly in the minority municipalities but in all municipalities.

We have had three meetings and a fourth meeting that will take place in Vienna on the 4<sup>th</sup> or May when we will discuss amongst other things how many new municipalities might be needed to be established, with what boundaries, and what sort of criteria in order to facilitate the municipalities where the Serbs might have the majority of the population.

We are preparing – our experts have been travelling in the region both in Pristina and Belgrade, consulting the Orthodox Church on cultural heritage and religious sites. And we will host in the coming month, actually during the month of May, a meeting on this issue as well.

Economic issues are an important topic that we intent to cover. Then we hope to have a meeting on minority rights, summing up the whole series of meeting that we have been having this year.

In the meantime my intention is to meet and discuss with the different governments in the region. This is my second trip [to the region]. I started with the closest neighbourhood and now I am here.

I am very pleased with the talks I had with the Foreign Minister. I have promised that we will take seriously the offers of assistance and see how the expertise can be drawn. What is also important is that Hungary has a unique position in the sense that both parties are listening to Hungary. So we have agreed with the Minister that we will be in touch because this is a complicated issue. It is not an easy one and it is not easy to create confidence after the kind of conflict that we have come through. Therefore the meetings are needed to be constructive. I always say that it is a good beginning if people start tolerating each other and from their own threshold position they can start building a new future for everyone. There is a lot of work ahead. Thank you very much.

*Question on when do you think there could be a meeting at a high level between the Presidents or Prime ministers:*

**MA:** That will be decided - at what level first of all a meeting will take place. It may be that it is a different level from what we have at the moment. At the moment, the Kosovo delegation is led by the Deputy Prime Minister, and senior advisers to the Prime Minister and the President are heading the Belgrade delegation. Whatever the level is, the important thing is that they have full authorities to negotiate the issues. I think that these talks that we are now engaged in will take us to summer. I was hoping that we could have finished all these meetings by the end of May but it may very well be before the mid of June. And before we go to actually status discussions, there are a lot of consultations that are going to be needed. I hope that that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kosovo Søren Jessen-Petersen will be in a position, when he goes to the Secretary-General, to report progress on the standards implementation, so that we can also make progress in our talks. That hopefully will create conditions for status talks. I would say that they would happen during the summer months – I do not know when your summer starts, I come from the North: we have a joke that it came and it lasted one day. But if you would ask me in a month, I do not think it is going to be June, but hopefully in July.

But the progress on these technical talks cannot depend entirely on me and my colleagues. Much more depends on how the parties cooperate. Sometimes I would like us to proceed much faster, but for one reason or another the parties are not always in the same hurry, as I and my colleagues would like to see. But before you ask anything about when will these things be resolved, I can only tell you that I have only one guideline, that is the published statement by the Contact Group meeting in London in the end of January this year, when the Contact Group said that we would hope that the solution would be found in the course of 2006. It is totally useless to start speculating on anything else. That is the only timeframe that we have at the moment. When we reach the autumn, then I will be prepared to answer you more precisely.

*Question (BBC): 1. You are travelling soon to Moscow and then to China. Obviously, the Russians have many reservations about independence of Kosovo. [Question on a risk of a veto.]*

*2. Since it is unlikely that the two parties will reach an agreement during the talks in Vienna, do you think the final decision will eventually have to be imposed by the UN?*

**MA:** I know your task is to ask me where people differ. I, as somebody who has to bring people together, am actually very impressed by how much they have actually agreed. I must say that I have been involved in a number of problematic areas in the world, the kind of unanimity that Contact Group has shown has not been seen anywhere.

I always recommend the reading of the guiding principles of the Contact Group and its press statement from London. You will be always surprised - I am every time I read it again - how far-reaching the agreement among the Contact Group members is, that (group) includes four permanent members (of the security Council), plus Germany and Italy. I think that one thing is very important for everybody in the Contact Group and that is that they want proper negotiations. And they want to see how the parties behave when we are trying to find a solution. And that goes for Russia too: they have emphasized that it is important that we carry out these talks. There has been full support from Russia for carrying out these decentralization talks and the others that I have mentioned. They want this process to go through. They do not want it artificially hurried. I do not think anyone in the Contact Group desires that. They have all agreed that it would be useful that it would be solved within 2006. They realize that artificial prolongation of these talks will not help. (There should not be) artificial hurry-up of these talks either.

I think that it is far too early to start speculating about how a final solution can be reached. I can only say that you have an agreed settlement on this hand and an imposed settlement on that hand and I hope there is something in between. We can all start thinking how this could be reached. But we are definitely working hard. And we are encouraging the parties and I hope you, in your role, will encourage them as well: Pristina, to create conditions for the Serb minority to live in safe conditions in Kosovo; and for Kosovo Serbs, with the Belgrade encouragement, to be forthcoming because it is very difficult to create better conditions if one side actually does not actually want to cooperate or to prevent cooperation.