



05 May 2006

## **Press Briefing by UN Deputy Special Envoy Albert Rohan after the fourth round of direct talks held in Vienna**

**Albert Rohan:** ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming. We have just finished a meeting that lasted one-and-a-half day. It was dealing with the issue of the boundaries of municipalities, in particular with the wish of the Serbian side to create a number of new Serbian-majority municipalities. I have said previously that we support this wish, which is also accepted in principle by the Kosovar side.

We discussed first what criteria should be applied for creating such new municipalities. There is some range of agreement that municipalities should have a fair size - as a target, 5,000 people in the municipality was mentioned -; that there should be a substantial Serbian majority in these municipalities - here the figure of 70% was mentioned; that of course municipalities have to be economically viable, must be functional and have the necessary infrastructure.

One difficult aspect is the question on how one includes the aspect of returnees. Clearly, in many municipalities there is a potential for a Serbian population, or an increase of the Serbian population, but they are not here. As IDPs, they are in Serbia or somewhere else. But they have the right to return. How do you reflect this potential return of Serbs? On the one hand nobody wants to create "ghost municipalities" in the hope that somebody may come; on the other hand there is a very real possibility - and it is the hope of the international community - that the maximum of people will indeed return.

We have heard the offers of the two sides. The Kosovo side offered three new municipalities in Gracanica, Ranilug and North Mitrovica, and one enlarged municipality that exists already in Novo Brdo, which would according to the Kosovo proposal be enlarged. On the Serbian side, there is a longer list of new municipalities, namely 14 new municipalities, with in addition five existing municipalities where the boundaries would be revised.

Some of these municipalities are the same like Gracanica - also the enlargement of Novo Brdo. Others are different ones, which have not been accepted by the Kosovo side so far. Some of them are very small, some of them are mainly consisting of churches, religious sites and monasteries; others are more the type of "hopeful municipalities" where

returnees may come back one day. We have to continue to work with the two sides on these two proposals.

That brings me to our working calendar. We have as the next point on our agenda the visit of an expert mission on economic matters both in Pristina and in Belgrade in the week between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. This will be led by Ambassador Lehne of the European Union. Here the main issue is the discussion on the division of assets, of debts and liabilities between Serbia and Kosovo.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, I shall lead a delegation to Belgrade, that will then go on the 18<sup>th</sup> to Pristina in order to review the work on the substantive aspects of decentralization, which we dealt with during the first three meetings here in Vienna. There are many open questions and we are going to resume the work directly with each side separately and try to get compromise solutions.

The next meeting here in Vienna will be on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May and this will concern the protection of the religious sites. We plan a one-day meeting on this issue. Then, depending on the results of the economic mission, some time towards the end of the month we plan to hold a meeting also on economic matters, also here in Vienna. This is the plan for the next few weeks.

I saw that I forgot about the proposals the very important aspect of Mitrovica. Here the Kosovo side proposed the establishment of two municipalities within one city, meaning that there would be a municipality in the North and one in the South but they would be linked. So: common institutions and a joint board with a mayor with some functional competencies in common. The Kovosar delegation also proposed that for three years there should be an international executive office, which would be overseeing the administration of the city. The Belgrade delegation proposed something different, namely to join the northern municipality of Mitrovica with the municipality of Zvecan and make one municipality out of two. These two proposals are obviously contradictory and there is no agreement on that. So again we have to continue to work. Thank you very much.

#### Questions/Answers

Question [*On the potential consequences for the Vienna talks of the suspension of stabilization association agreement with the EU and of possible early elections in Serbia*]

**Albert Rohan:** Well we have always maintained, Mr. Ahtisaari has maintained, that the question of the European track for Serbia, beginning with the discussions on stabilization association agreement and then moving hopefully into the position of a candidate country has nothing to do with Kosovo or with our work. It's unrelated, and therefore whatever the EU decides on suspending or not suspending their meeting doesn't directly touch us. Of course psychologically and politically this has an impact, but first there's nothing

that we can do about it and secondly we cannot be influenced by these kinds of developments in our work. And on the question of whether there will be elections or not, I don't have the faintest idea, you better ask the Serbian delegation, and I am certainly not going to comment on the internal matters of Serbia.

*Question: [on a lack of conclusions after the meeting]*

**Albert Rohan:** Well, after every meeting we have conclusions and the question is less a question of conclusions but rather whether we can find an agreement. And that's true that we did not find agreements on the totality of these issues. What I always say is: we have found common ground on a number of issues and it is our task to enlarge this common ground. On the question of the boundaries this was the first meeting. It was a very good meeting may I say. Both sides really discussed in a matter-of-fact way, by-and-large the issues and the question of municipalities. From the point of view of the outsider, which we are, the facilitator if you want, there is no absolute truth. You can argue both proposals with very good arguments. We have to try to bring the positions closer together. And that this is not possible in the first meeting it is obvious, but in the previous meetings, although there were differences in approaches and concept we do have a number of common grounds which is not lost, this will remain.

*Question: Will they be any further decentralization talks in Vienna?*

**Albert Rohan:** No. As you can see from my work programme, the next date when we will discuss this is when I go with my team to Belgrade and Pristina. Instead of having another meeting with both sides in Vienna, we will try a different way. We'll talk to each side separately and see if we can make progress that way.

*Question: [On Mitrovica, regarding the proposed international administration, on whether the case of Mostar was mentioned and whether it was considered as a good example]*

**Albert Rohan:** It was not mentioned.

*Question: Are you optimistic on the future of negotiations?*

**Albert Rohan:** I am an optimist by nature. It doesn't mean that I am naïve. I think we have to be optimistic. We don't only believe in the intelligence of people but also of the wisdom of people and therefore I am realistically optimistic.

*Question: what would be the breaking point for the negotiations?*

**Albert Rohan:** There is no breaking point; there are different approaches, different proposals, and different approaches. Some of them, for instance if you talk about competencies to be given to the municipality there are many similar views on the two sides that municipalities should deal with the health system the education system and

local security and local economy, and environment. I mean: everybody agrees on that so there are a large number of communalities but it is true that there are as many differences still.

*Question: In case UNOSEK would have to make a decision, of which side would it be closer?*

**Albert Rohan:** Well we don't make a decision. This is a mistake to believe that. We are here, by the mandate of the UN Secretary-General to facilitate as it says the process of the future status. That's what we are doing. We are doing more than facilitating: we try also to bring in proposals at some stages but it's not our decision. It is in first instance the decision of the parties and whatever the result of this process is, we will report to the SG and it is up to him what he does with it.

*Question: [On the possibility for Mitrovica to have two municipalities linked by a governing body]*

**Albert Rohan:** Well this is the proposal from the Kosovo side. They have proposed exactly that. These are 2 municipalities but linked together by as they say a board and eventually by a mayor, who would be elected. It's certainly a possibility. The question is: how realistic is it to keep, or to reunite Mitrovica. If you think there is hope that Mitrovica will be a unified city, then of course this proposal this is to be taken as serious. If you say that the reality that the two sides will never go together again, well then other avenues are open. So, of course it is a possibility and it is part of the Kosovar proposal.