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## **Statement by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Ivaylo Kalfin of Bulgaria in Sofia**

*Following is the statement made by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Ivaylo Kalfin of Bulgaria in Sofia today:*

**Martti Ahtisaari:** I am extremely pleased that I have had the chance to start my discussion and consultations here this morning, I have engaged recently in my work in travelling in the region. I have been in two other regional countries and next week I intend to visit Slovenia and later on in the month I am also going to be in the Czech Republic and cover some other countries. We had a meeting with the Minister in Thessaloniki last week.

It is very important that I have the chance to listen to the views of the government(s) and also to explain what we are doing at the moment in Vienna. We are engaged in practical discussions that will contribute for some time to come. We had the fourth meeting last Thursday and Friday chaired by my Deputy Albert Rohan on decentralization. This time we were particularly looking into issues that had to do with the number of municipalities particularly looking at the municipalities where the Kosovo Serbs would have a majority.

It's not surprising that, when the parties come to a meeting and bring their starting positions, that immediately we cannot see that everyone agrees and we close our discussions on this topic. The idea was from the beginning that my colleagues will be travelling in the region and they are doing so next week. They are going both to Pristina and Belgrade and continue discussions and see how they will move forward.

We have already scheduled another meeting on these practical issues that will deal with the cultural heritage and religious sites and that meeting will take place in Vienna on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. We want to have a meeting on economic issues, which for both sides is clearly vital and then hopefully also we will discuss further the minority issues.

What is the whole idea behind these technical talks is that we will see if it is possible to create conditions in Kosovo where the minorities - not only the Serb minority but the other minorities as well - can live comfortably before we moved to the Status discussions.

Of course it is important, as the Prime Minister mentioned, that everyone participates. Therefore I encourage the Kosovo Serbs to take part in the institutions established in Kosovo, because that will facilitate also the creation of the conditions for them that they will feel comfortable.

The international community under any circumstances will be staying in Kosovo for some time to come. That has been said very clearly and the process is going on at the same time as we are talking in Vienna in preparation of the international community's presence. That of course will include NATO, it will include the EU and it will include the OSCE. And we will carefully look what are those tasks that are still needed for the intention of the international community.

We will take stock in June of the progress made before we start discussing the parties, the Secretary-General and the Security Council how to approach the actual Status talks.

Before we move to that case the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Søren Jensen Petersen will report to the Security Council with news on the Standards implementation. That is very important [inaudible, voice covered by others] Those Standards are particularly important when we talk about creating conditions for the minorities to be comfortable.

I will be returning to Vienna after these different meetings today. I will be travelling to the United States, to the UN and to Washington on Wednesday. On Monday I will go to Slovenia, and from there to Brussels and later on I will be in Strasbourg in another meeting.

Thank you very much.

## **Questions/Answers**

*[Question on the timeframe for the talks]*

**Martti Ahtisaari:** You are right that the Contact Group, which has been working actively on the issue of Kosovo, has expressed that this Kosovo status issue could be found during the course of 2006. It is not an ultimatum, but I think it is a clear vision that four permanent members and three important European countries have expressed their vision on the end of the agenda. That is the only time frame we have at the moment. We try to follow that. But I think more important is that we try to do a thorough job and that's why I described to you in what we are engaged in at the moment.

When it comes to the future status of Kosovo, first of all it is important to realise that the present Status cannot continue, otherwise I wouldn't have been asked to be engaged in these talks. I think there is also a clear understanding in the International Community at last, that when we come to the Status - and it will be decided hopefully before the end of the year - that this solution would increase the stability in the region. I don't think that the International Community would be trying to solve this issue by

increasing instability. The idea is that stability should increase. And also that Kosovo would become economically viable in the years to come and that sustainability would be there.... So, in the light of that I sincerely hope that whatever the Status may be in the end that it would not in any way threaten anybody. I think that's something that we need to keep in mind.

Whether there is going to be a resolution or not, I think it is up to the Security Council in the end to decide. We are far from that. I think there is no point in starting to speculate on what might happen in the latter part of this year. We have a lot of practical work to be done and that has to be done because without that work, done by us in our meetings in Vienna, in our consultations in Pristina and Belgrade and in Kosovo, we can't actually move to the status discussions. There has to be also progress in Kosovo on the Standards implementation and the present leadership is moving forward for that purpose. So let's try to be patient and after a couple of months' time, I will be prepared to answer some of your questions, but not now.

*Question: [On what would be the ideal outcome of the status discussion in Ahtisaari's opinion.]*

**Martti Ahtisaari:** I think we are all aware what the positions of the parties are at the moment and there hasn't been any change since I started in November. The Kosovo Albanians want full independence and Serbia has been talking about far-reaching autonomy. You will not see any engaging in public on what the future status of Kosovo will be. I am not in a position to do that. That's why you will here me from onwards as well - telling you what we intend to do, because if we don't do what we are engaged at the moment in doing then there isn't much point in talking about the future status. I will come to those issues in due course but it's far too premature at the moment to start from my side indicating the outcome of the status talks. We haven't even started the process yet. We have the opening statements when I travelled to the region at the end of November and I haven't heard that the positions would have changed. But we have many months to come before we come to that issue. Thank you.