



UNOSEK

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Press Briefing after Fifth Vienna round of talks on decentralization

Bernhard Schlagheck, UNOSEK Senior Adviser: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be with you. Very briefly on the meeting: We had a substantial exchange of all the issues pertaining to decentralization in Kosovo and in a slightly different format as we had so far, a kind of proximity talks that led in the end to a plenary session a rather brief plenary session. Proximity talks, this is a format in which UNOSEK actually had bi-lateral consultations with the respective parties.

The meeting produced some welcome results, particularly on the set of principles UNOSEK produced. Certainly there was no breakthrough. There are still major disagreements on a number of issues but certainly on the principles we somewhat closed the gap. We identified major areas of concerns and to some extent disagreement of the parties and I think we all developed a better understanding of where the parties stand on that protracted issue of decentralization.

Let me briefly say from my point of view where the major stumbling blocks lie. On the one hand, for the Belgrade delegation, in the area of competencies particularly the question of the degree of municipal involvement in police and justice, curricular for the educational system and the structures of the Serbian language university; and for Pristina particularly the question of asymmetric decentralization. That would mean whether some competencies, very few [additional] competencies should be given to Kosovo Serbian majority municipalities.

We then discussed quite extensively the question of new municipalities. Here again and I can say we somewhat narrowed differences between the parties, albeit not very substantively. But again Pristina made I think a rather welcome move to offer two new municipalities in Kosovo, in Partesh and in Klokott/Vrbovac. As I said that was very appreciated. We had equally in exchange a few with the Belgrade delegation on their separate proposal for municipalities. On the so-called standard municipalities, there was not, there was only very little flexibility shown, but on the non-standard municipalities - what can be described as return municipalities, particular cases for instances as Velika Hodja - there seems to be a readiness to move here. And that also was appreciated. Also Belgrade made some amendments to their original offer on municipalities, actually reduced their set of offer on municipalities and that also was appreciated.

On Mitrovica, it is very clear to us all, this is one of the key issues and certainly we did not manage to resolve that issue today. But I have to say there was a very useful exchange of views, very substantive, on both sides. Certainly we have to work very

intensively on Mitrovica together with the parties, but also to make up the mind, together in context of the International community, particularly of the Contact Group.

The way ahead very briefly: we decided loosely to come together after the Elephant round on 24th, the High-Level talk on the future Status of Kosovo for another round of consultation most probably again in that proximity talks fashion, but we haven't actually set the date for it. We will be in contact to resume and continue work, particularly on the details of decentralization on those accounts, principles and new municipality including Mitrovica.

Thank you

Question:

Q: (EFE) Did I understand you correctly ? You said the Serbs reduced the number of municipalities they want for Kosovo Serbs.

Bernhard Schlagheck: Yes, they reduced a number of municipalities, I mean they came with an initial offer and they reduced some of them.

Q: (EFE) Can you be more precise?

Bernhard Schlagheck: No, I do not want to be more precise.