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Press Conference by UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari after the High-level meeting in Vienna

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

I want to make a statement and then I am prepared to answer your questions

We have just had a high level political meeting on the future status of Kosovo. Belgrade delegation was led by President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica, and Pristina's Team of Unity was led by President Sejdiu. The meeting was also observed by representatives from the UNMIK, Contact Group, EU and NATO;

Our meeting here today is a result of the clear wish on the part of the parties to move to direct talks on the future status. As the first meeting of its kind, today's discussion was meant to enable both sides to present and justify their respective positions, and the meeting did achieve that objective;

The presentations showed that it is evident that the positions of the parties remain far apart: Belgrade would agree to almost anything but independence, whereas Pristina would accept nothing but full independence;

We are ready to continue to facilitate the dialogue on the political level. Whether these talks will bring any agreement ultimately depends on the willingness and readiness of the parties.

It is our intention to move rapidly forward with further discussions on the technical aspects, as I have mentioned those so-called status neutral talks. So far we have held direct talks on decentralization, the protection of cultural and religious sites and economic issues. Although progress has been uneven, it is my view that these talks have provided us with the basis on which to continue to move forward.

We will also focus increasingly on areas which have not been discussed, namely - community rights and constitutional and institutional aspects of the status process. Again, substantial progress in these areas requires the parties to be realistic and flexible. I have to mention in this connection as well that the progress on this issues depends on parties.

One of the central aims of the international community is to create the conditions in Kosovo where all communities can live in a multi-ethnic society. In order to be able to create these conditions, the full support of Serbia is of vital importance. It is not

possible to create appropriate conditions if Belgrade refuses to cooperate on this matter. I have appealed to the Belgrade delegation to facilitate the process.

I have reminded the participants today that we should not lose sight of the fact that the process we are engaged in is about all the people of Kosovo, from all of Kosovo's communities. The people expect their political leaders to exercise leadership, so does the international community. In that context, I welcome the Contact Group statement which was delivered in the meeting just now.

Questions/Answers

Q: Shaban Buza from Reuters: Mr. Ahtisaari, after today's meeting do you think still that the final status has to be settled by the end of this year?

Martti Ahtisaari: I don't see any reason to change the plans. This is a commonly accepted call and therefore we are working flat out this summer and I appeal to both parties and I apologise actually, that I am destroying their holiday plans if they ever had any, because the first meetings will take place hopefully very early in August. And our technical missions will be travelling to the region throughout the month of August and then we are scheduling meetings again in the last week of August and very early on in September. Because, I want to know, come middle of September, where we are on these issues. I expect that with good will from both sides, we should be able to make progress.

Q: (Emily Harris from National Public Radio): If the two sides aren't able to come to an agreement on the Status, what are you going to do? What is your timeline for that?

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all we have to keep in mind that this was the first gathering and I said to the parties that I was actually impressed that we could carry out these discussions in a manner we did. I had invited, as I said, the Contact Group to be present there which I found very useful and they have made a statement, which you will have available.

There was also understanding that it would be very important to move forward with these so-called technical talks. When we had the two meetings last week on Tuesday and Wednesday my sense from those meetings was that progress is possible. And therefore we are moving very fast on these issues. Because if we can have progress on those issues then of course that would create confidence in the overall process.

But after first meeting on Status issues I think it would be premature for me to start making any forecast about the future meetings.

Q: (Arber Vllahiu, BBC) : You have said that apart from this meeting you are going to organize the other meetings on the technical level. But are you planning to very soon organize a meeting as you have been calling them "Elephants" once again?

Martti Ahtisaari: We will see. I want to concentrate now the period from tomorrow onwards, let's talk about tomorrow and from there onwards. And we have been looking at the work plan internally in our office for August and September and we

will definitely concentrate now on these issues that we have been handling and some where as I mentioned which we haven't yet been handling at all. So, my priority is to deal with these issues. Whether, we need this sort of round - we may need this sort of round for various reasons. Not only to talk Status. Because as I said, if I don't see that my colleagues making progress on the technical issues, I may have to call the political actors together and we have to discuss why is it despite that the statements made that everyone wants to co-operate with us and find solutions, practical solutions to these technical issues. If we are not making progress I may have to call on them and ask them to either meet here or somewhere else. So, we have left it open and I am sure that the leaders will be available if I call a meeting on Status again.

Q: Cufaj, Koha Ditore: I have a simple question was there a kind of handshake, what was the atmosphere today between the two sides?

Martti Ahtisaari: Of course we had opportunities to meet because Chancellor Schüssel was kind enough to organise a lunch for the delegations. Of course if you sit at a table with everybody else, and I saw my colleagues being distributed throughout the different tables and both delegations as well, of course people talk to each other. Because if they can talk in a room facing each other, many of these people who were here [*missing*] have no stand for many years already. I think atmosphere was - should I say that it was better that I could have expected.

Follow-up, Koha Ditore: What have you expected ?

Martti Ahtisaari: I did not expect much quite frankly, and I had said so, because it is not an easy thing for either of the parties to come to this sort of meeting. I have been going through in my long life very similar situations and I understand that there are some complications with this sort of set-up. But I was pleasantly surprised that it was a good discussion: frank, candid, I do not think the people were mincing their words but it was in a civilised manner.

Q : (Artan Mustafa, Express, Pristina) : In your Security Council report, you said that Pristina was generally more constructive, and Belgrade uneven. What do you think of today: who was more convincing ?

Martti Ahtisaari: You are asking an old teacher to give a sort of certificate. I do not think I will follow on that track. Let's remember what was the idea of this meeting. The idea was to give both parties a chance to present their case and I think both did it well. Both argued why they had the views they have. Then I was also pleased that after the lunch we had a very vivid discussion, because I was first wondering we would actually have any discussion after the good lunch. But there was a good discussion and both parties participated in that, the Contact group made their own statement there and UNMIK acting Chief Steven Schook also made a statement. So I think you have to ask the parties that question: how do they feel, whether they think they made a good presentation. I think both parties did from their point. And that was the whole idea of this meeting. This was the starting process of the actual core issue of status. Let's keep that in mind. That puts also the expectations into the right aspect.

Q: Nicholas (New York Times) How do you think the negotiations can be wrapped up this year ? If you look at disputes like Cyprus for example, where you have two

irreconcilable positions ? What gives you the confidence that you can wrap that this year?

Martti Ahtisaari: The mere fact that I first have a Contact Group that is united in its views to a surprising extent. I keep on emphasizing that every time I speak and I have said it in a number of occasions. I think this would be a rather lonely job for me and Albert Rohan if we did not have a Contact Group supporting us. And if you look at the composition of the Contact Group you realize what I mean. *They* have actually come up with the timeframe, so it is not my invention. They are pushing us to move - all of us, the parties and us - to try to find a solution within this calendar year. And we will see in due course. I think it is a bit premature to start speculating on the timeframe, and much wiser to come at the end of September when we will meet also hopefully the Foreign Ministers of the Contact Group [countries] in New York, and the Security Council and the Secretary General during the high-level phase of the General Assembly, roughly from the middle of September onwards.

Q: [on whether there is any proposal from the Contact group, Eu or NATO, that can be an incentive to help have a compromise]

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all, I am not aware of any incentive plan anywhere that has a direct link to Kosovo. I understand that there has been discussions because we have two separate tracks: we have Kosovo, we have Serbia. Serbia with its ambitions to join the EU, perhaps to join NATO, have a good cooperation with the financial institutions of the world, and incentives are perhaps discussed. I hope they would include, and I am now referring to the discussions that have to do for instance relaxing visa regulations for some categories of populations, students for instance, researchers, etc. So of course these are being discussed. But what is expected in this overall process from Serbia is to cooperate with us in our efforts to facilitate that we can conditions for all the citizens of Kosovo, including minorities, to have a decent life in Kosovo. There we are looking to Belgrade and I hope that we can more and more count on their support in finding practical solutions.

Q (Tina Kraja, AP): Mr Ahtisaari, have you noticed in this meeting any sign of a breakthrough ? Any sort of sign that could make you believe that the two sides may reconcile eventually.

Martti Ahtisaari: No, I haven't. I would be lying if I would say so. And I did not even expect it. This is the first meeting of this kind, and as I said, and I want to repeat it again, that the idea of this meeting was to give the parties an opportunity to present their case. I think it would be totally wrong from my side to even expect that there would be any breakthrough. This was not the type of meeting. But parties have asked for the opportunity to meet and also present their case, And they can make their case also through you to the wider world and not only in that [conference] room to each other.

Thanks you very much