

8 August 2006

Press encounter by Mr. Schlagheck after the first round of talks on minority rights

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are at the end of the first round of direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina delegations on community rights and protections. The meeting began with presentations by the parties of their views on the principles for the protection and promotion of community rights in Kosovo. The discussions then moved to a detailed exchange of views on the representation of communities in Kosovo's institutions and a mechanism for the protection of community rights in the institutions, particular focus was laid here on mechanisms by which vital interest to Kosovo communities could be pursued.

A session of the talks was also devoted to specific sectors of community rights, such as language rights, media, freedom of movement. While we had some substantive exchange of views on some of the issues on the agenda, the positions of the parties were conceptually far apart. The Pristina delegation made actually concrete proposals on community rights, which have been elaborated through a consultative process in Kosovo over the last months. The Belgrade delegation presented its view on the principles that should be taken into account in addressing community rights in Kosovo in the framework of status talks, they did not actually come up with concrete proposals.

Following this first meeting, UNOSEK intends to engage with the sides on these issues further through expert level talks to both Pristina and Belgrade with the focus on detail of practical proposals. We particularly noted the intention of the Pristina delegation to consult further with UNOSEK, but at some stage also with Belgrade, on their positions and to work on their proposals.

Question: *on Pristina's proposals*

Bernhard Schlagheck: As I said, they had elaborated I would say a rather comprehensive paper with a set of proposals they introduced today - it was related to a number of areas, as I said before, the representation of communities in institutions in Kosovo, Assembly, Government on the municipal level and the judiciary. They came up with concrete proposals on the so-called vital interest mechanism as I referred to before, and also on language rights, freedom of movement and so on and so forth.

Question: *on the absence of Kosovo Serbs at today's meeting*

Bernhard Schlagheck: Well, let me say that we noted that the decision was made by the Kosovo-Serb representatives not to participate, and that their positions would be reflected by the Belgrade delegations. This is of course a decision which is entirely up to them. We would however point out that this decision is a missed opportunity to engage in the process, which is of central importance for all of Kosovo's communities, not least the Serbian community.

Question: (inaudible)

Bernhard Schlagheck: No, I wouldn't like to go into any kind of details. I think the basic disagreement was that Pristina prepared to discuss and to table concrete proposals, suggesting concrete solutions to utterly concrete problems in Kosovo. Whereas for principle reasons, the Belgrade delegation thought all discussions on community protection need to be pursued, let's say, in the framework of status talks. I have to say possibly this is a misunderstanding. What we said from the outset that all issues are on the table now, particularly after the 24th July high level political talk on the status. So all issues are on the table now, and possibly we can clarify this possible misunderstanding here.

Question: (inaudible)

Bernhard Schlagheck: I would ask for your understanding that I would like to limit myself to commenting this round.

Question: on the next step

Bernhard Schlagheck: As I said before our intention is certainly to bring the parties closer together. That is the very purpose of a negotiating process. We intend to go to Pristina but we also intend to go to Belgrade, and again I hope we will succeed in narrowing differences, particularly in this issue which is of vital importance of community protection.

Question: (inaudible)

Bernhard Schlagheck: Well, Mr. Ahtisaari provided - on the occasion of the high level political talks on the 24th of July - both parties with a rather comprehensive work plan. This work plan foresees indeed some further meetings in Vienna, certainly on the issue of decentralization, possibly on other issues as well. But I do not want to be too specific here because again it hinges on the result that might emerge from these expert level consultations.

Thank you very much.