

15 September 2006

Press Briefing by UN Deputy Special Envoy Albert Rohan after the eighth round of direct talks on Decentralization

(Due to technical problems, we have only the transcript of the Statement made by Deputy Special Envoy Albert Rohan and the first question out of five- We apologize for any inconvenience)

Albert Rohan: ladies and gentlemen, as you know we discussed today the question of municipal boundaries and in essence the question of the establishment of new Serb majority municipalities and then the complicated question of Mitrovica. This was in a way a leftover of last round. For time reasons we could not tackle these aspects so we had to have another meeting today. .

These are very technical questions. I am not to run through the list of municipalities because it is in most of instances the question of: if we create certain new municipalities, how large would they be, how many cadastral units should they include. There is agreement on the creation of certain municipalities. The Kosovo delegation, which originally had proposed three new municipalities and the enlargement of Gračanica and Novo Brdo, has upgraded its proposal to five, so according to them there would be five new Kosovo Serb majority municipalities, plus the enlargement of two of these municipalities.

There is agreement on the fact that the municipalities should be created in Gračanica, in Ranillug, in Partesh, in Klokott; there is the question of the enlargement of Novo Brdo. As I said, it is only the question of how far, how big should these municipalities be.

There is no agreement on the question of establishing a new municipality in Obilić, and there is no agreement on the establishment of Serb municipalities, which have been requested by the Serbian delegation, which do not fully correspond to the criteria of 5.000 inhabitants, which we agreed on at the beginning. Two of them, in the Serbian view, should be exception to this rule for specific reason, like Velika Hodža [which] is a very important, and very valued religious site, and others should be created as so-called “return municipalities”, where there are prospects that refugees, IDP, may return if they know that there will be a Serbian-majority municipality established. This is the rationale.

These concepts however have been rejected by the Kosovo delegation. On one aspect, which was a request from previous times from the Serbian delegation to have a municipality in Gazimestan around a monument, this has been given up by the Serbian delegation and this will be dealt with in the framework of the protection of cultural sites. Now coming to Mitrovica, the two proposals I think are known to you. The Kosovo delegation proposes “One city, two municipalities”, and Mitrovica South should also include three Albanian villages which are north of the Ibar River. I think - as the Kosovo delegation will probably explain to you later on- really what is the foreground of the preoccupation is the perspective of the two sides of the city is being maintained. And all the proposals which the Kosovo delegation put forward have this goal in mind. They proposed that, although the two municipalities – Mitrovica South, Mitrovica North- should have the competencies which are foreseen in the decentralization process, that there should be a City Board, which should be obligatory in the view of the Kosovo delegation, which has certain executive, coordinating, consultative functions as appropriate.

From the Serbian delegation, we have the proposal that there should be two municipalities, but that North Mitrovica should be merged with Zvecan, and that anything north of the Ibar should go to this new Zvecan-North Mitrovica municipality. And as far as the joint Board, or whatever you call it, is concerned, the Serbian delegation would accept it as a voluntary institution for the purpose of exercising certain functions of the municipalities, like water management or waste management, or local economic activity, things like that. But the difference is that, under the Serb delegation, this is more a matter of practical, voluntary cooperation rather than an institutional and obligatory institution.

As I said, these are extremely technical and detailed talks. On the positive side, the talks were substantive, with both sides discussed this in an issue-oriented way, with only a minimum of polemics. Progress, we did make. There is no major movement on either side. The only new element is that the Serbian delegation has given up the idea a municipality of Gazimestan. On the other hand, some of the concessions which were made in the expert’s talks by the Serbian delegation are now being made contingent to the acceptance of other requests in this field. And as I said the Kosovo delegation has announced and confirmed the concessions which they did make in our expert talks and when president Ahtisaari was in Pristina lately.

My conclusion is that the prospect of progress in these talks is increasingly slim. Nevertheless UNOSEK will continue to work on this technical issues and we will try to find solutions by whatever means may be useful, for solutions which are fair, which are reasonable and which are functional.”

Thank you

Questions/Answers

Q: (AP) On whether the explosion that destroyed the car of the Interior minister in Kosovo last night clouded the negotiations.

Albert Rohan: I haven't read any detailed news on the subject. We were closed in this room and you from the press probably have faster and more precise information. I cannot tell you anything. It was not mentioned in the talks. It is news to me. If this is indeed the happening you described of course we would condemn it like all attacks of this kind.

(End due to technical problems)