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## **Statement by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan of Slovakia in Bratislava**

*Following is the statement made by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan of Slovakia in Bratislava today:*

**M. Ahtisaari:** Ladies and Gentlemen, First of all I want to thank Mr Kukan for the opportunity to continue our dialogue. We are old friend and we have been talking about Balkans for many, many years now. The last meeting we had was in connection with the EU foreign ministers meeting in Salzburg recently.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today because it is extremely useful to be able to exchange views on a process that has started. We in Vienna are in a process of carrying out talks, facilitating talks between Belgrade and Pristina. On decentralization, on technical issues. We have had so far three rounds of talks and the fourth round will take place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of next month. The next meeting in Vienna on the 4<sup>th</sup> will deal with the question of municipalities: how many municipalities will be required where they might be a Serb majority and how the boundaries might be influenced by these possibly new municipalities?

We will then go to other meetings. We have still a number of topics to be covered.

One area is the cultural heritage – the religious site. My colleagues have been this week in Pristina and Belgrade preparing for a meeting. They are still looking for a proper date that is suitable for both parties.

Economic issues are also on the agenda. We will have a meeting on those and we have received already material from both parties and our experts have been discussing in the capitals on that. And the last item on these talks is going to be the minority rights and the minority protection in Kosovo. That will end our talks in this fields.

Then the time will be for me to brief the Security Council and the Secretary-General. I will be in New York talking to my colleagues in the Secretariat on the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> of May, this time not to the Security Council but to my colleagues in the Department of Peacekeeping and Political Affairs.

My idea is to carry on consultation also in the region this month and next month. I hope to visit in the end of May Moscow again. I am also planning to go to China to see the Chinese government because I think it is important to keep all the Permanent members of the Security Council in these discussions. In the Contact Group, as you know, we have four permanent members. They are well informed so that is the reason for my trip to Beijing.

Why is it important for me to be here today ? It is because first of all Slovakia is extremely knowledgeable about the region. Secondly, Slovakia is a member of all the important organizations European Union, NATO, OSCE, and is at the moment also in the Security Council. So I am sure you will see me more often here discussing with the Foreign Minister on the problems and I very much value his advice on these talks. Thank you very much.

**Question to M. Ahtisaari on whether he believes in a successful outcome of the process**

**M. Ahtisaari:** I think it is important to emphasize that we are at the moment involved in discussions that are supposed to create conditions for the minorities in Kosovo to have a decent life. And these are totally independent from whatever the Status might be in the end. We cannot discuss the status of Kosovo before we know that all the people in Kosovo can have a decent life and opportunities. Like in all negotiations it is not surprising that the parties come from very far away from each other in the beginning. We try to help the process by making our own proposals in these talks. We have done that already and hopefully that will help move the negotiations because the negotiations do not mean that the parties come to the table and present their own views: It is the beginning of the process that starts. Some issues are easier to come to an understanding and agreement. Others are more complicated, more difficult and therefore we - I and my colleagues - are there to facilitate this process. As minister Kukan mentioned, this process is very important. But it is also important to understand that we are fully supported by the International Community on how we intend to move forward. When this process is over, then we'll have to consult the Security Council, the Secretary-General and others. We will move then in due course this year to discuss the actual status issues. But that will come afterwards.