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Pristina, Belgrade delegations meet in Vienna to discuss the future status process for Kosovo

Vienna – Delegations from Pristina and Belgrade today concluded in Vienna their first round of direct negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary-General Special Envoy for the future status process of Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, and chaired by his Deputy, Albert Rohan.

“The meeting in the last two days was conducted in a very cooperative spirit. Both sides gave the impression - and they pledged it – to cooperate with us and to further work on the various aspects examined”, the Deputy Special Envoy said, adding: “There may be differences of approaches, but it was equally visible that in practical terms we could find a lot of common grounds and whatever differences may exist they can be bridged to a large extent through practical means.”

The first round of talks focused on decentralization, as one of the core issues to be addressed in the context of the status resolution. The delegates exchanged views on the competencies at the municipal level in a number of areas, such as: health care, education, culture, social welfare, police and justice. The Deputy Special Envoy said at a press conference that common grounds were found in all the above areas.

“These kind of matters we discussed are not earth-shattering matters in the political sense, but they are extremely important for the people concerned and we tried to approach this really from a practical point”, the Deputy Special Envoy said.

Mr. Rohan also announced that both parties had decided to have an additional formal meeting in the same composition on the 17th of March, which will continue the discussions on the conceptual aspects of decentralization, such as local finance, inter-municipal cooperation and links between Kosovo municipalities and municipalities in Serbia, as well as with Belgrade. He said that UNOSEK will send expert delegations to both Belgrade and Pristina to have further in-depth discussions.

Both delegations for the first round of discussions were comprised of eight members. The Belgrade delegation was co-chaired by Slobodan Samardžić, adviser to Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica and Leon Kojen, advisor to President Boris Tadić. The Pristina delegation was led by Minister of Local Government Lutfi Haziri.