



UNOSEK/PR/7  
Tuesday, 23 May 2006

## **Pristina, Belgrade delegations discuss protection of religious and cultural heritage in Kosovo**

**Vienna** – Delegations from Pristina and Belgrade today held in Vienna a round of direct negotiations on the protection of religious and culture heritage in Kosovo. The talks were held 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.

“Although there are numbers of conceptual differences, if you look into the individual measures to protect the church and religious sites, there are far-reaching agreements and this is a good basis for any continued work on this topic”, Mr. Rohan said at a press conference afterwards.

The Deputy Special Envoy announced that the parties had agreed to establish an expert group consisting of the parties involved and the international institutions that work in this field, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, to both discuss the criteria for the establishment of protective zones around the religious sites and the delimitation of these zones on a case by case basis.

Mr. Rohan said there was a “total agreement” that access of pilgrims, authorities and others to churches and monasteries should be in principle at the discretion of the respective institutions involved, adding that there were also wide agreements on tax and custom duty privileges, and that the Serbian Orthodox Church should enjoy any kind of support in term of welfare, social and pension benefits or health insurance coming from anybody who would wish to provide them, including Belgrade.

Mr. Rohan announced that the parties "agreed in principle to set up an implementation committee to supervise the implementation of all arrangements on the protection of religious sites that will be contained in the status settlement”. He added that UNOSEK is now waiting for the proposition of both sides regarding the terms of reference and the composition of the Committee.

The next round of direct talks, focusing on Economy, will take place in Vienna on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2006.