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Pristina, Belgrade delegations discuss economic status issues

Vienna – Delegations from Pristina and Belgrade today held in Vienna a round of direct negotiations on economic status issues. The talks were held under the auspices of the Secretary-General Special Envoy for the future status process of Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, and co-chaired by Deputy Special Envoy Albert Rohan and EU representative for the status talks Stefan Lehne, who is also head of the UNOSEK working group on economy.

Stefan Lehne, who headed the preparatory meeting for the economic meeting, said that “some of the issues discussed are very closely related to the core status issues and therefore difficult to handle at this stage of the process, adding that “there are important economic interest aspects at stake both for Serbia and for Kosovo and, thirdly, some of these issues are technically enormously complex issues”.

The meeting was very useful since it allowed a better understanding on the position of both sides, Mr. Lehne explained. However, he added, “at this stage we should have no illusion. There are very, very considerable differences of views on some of the key issues on the agenda”.

Mr. Lehne said that on an overall approach of the question of external debt, there was a certain amount of agreement, since Kosovo is prepared to pay a share of the international debt of Serbia and Montenegro. “We hope that the process of the reconciliation of the debt can now move ahead”, said Mr. Lehne, who appealed both side to share the relevant documentation they have with the other party.

On the property issue, Mr. Lehne said “there is a really fundamental disagreement between the parties on some important issues”. He explained that “it is not in the mandate of UNOSEK to either fundamentally renegotiate the economic legislation of Kosovo of the last seven year or to interfere with the management of the process in Kosovo”, adding: “The task of the status process on the property issue is to look at the mechanisms that are in place that should guarantee that claims regarding private property or privatization are handled correctly even after 1244 is replaced by another resolution.”

Mr. Lehne said that both sides also had the opportunity to bring to the table other interest they want to discuss in the process of the status issue. Belgrade brought the issue of internal debt, while Pristina raised the issues of the cadastral documentation, of pension rights, of foreign currency accounts and the idea of an overall compensation mechanism to deal with claims by private individuals. It was agreed by both sides that they would exchange relevant information and will return to this issue at a later stage.

Mr. Rohan announced that UNOSEK technical experts would have a meeting tomorrow in Vienna with members of the Pristina delegation on decentralization, particularly on the creation of new municipalities. The UNOSEK experts will also go to Belgrade in the next few days to discuss the same issue.

The Deputy Special Envoy announced that UNOSEK is currently establishing the working group on the creation of protective zones for the religious sites. The group includes UNOSEK, representatives of Belgrade, of Pristina, of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as experts from the Council of Europe and UNESCO. “We hope to dispatch the working group in the region in the week of the 12th of June”, Mr. Rohan added.

The Deputy Special Envoy announced that the Government in Pristina today approved the Protocol on sustainable returns to be signed with Belgrade. Although the protocol does not fall under the competences of UNOSEK, an agreement was achieved in Vienna on the fringe of the meeting held on 23rd May thanks to “the energetic work of members of both delegations”, Mr. Rohan explained. The signature will take place in Pristina.