



03 March 2006

Press Briefing by UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari, in Pristina

Martti Ahtisaari: Ladies and Gentlemen of the media, in these past three days here in Pristina I have met with the new President Sejdiu. I had a private meeting with him and then a meeting with the Negotiation Team led by him. I had separate meetings with the Mayors of the Serb Municipalities and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities. I also met the representatives of the other minorities and today I had a fairly long meeting with the women leaders in the society.

As usual, I also met with the representatives of our international interlocutors in Pristina : UNMIK, EU, Contact Group and the KFOR;

I paid a visit to Lipjan where I talked to the Municipal leaders as well as religious leaders.

I arrived at a time when the Government here is going through changes. I believe and trust that the changes will not affect the status talks and I would sincerely hope that the changes would only accelerate the process, as we have no time to lose.

I told the leaders that the decentralization talks held in Vienna last week were a good start and I urged them to be continuously engaged. I confirm that the next meeting on decentralization will be held in Vienna on March 17th - I encouraged the leaders to look to the future, instead of dwelling on the past. The process, after all, is about the future status, about what kind of society Kosovo will become.

I informed the leaders that in order to facilitate the talks, I will send an Expert Team to visit Belgrade and Pristina next week.

I also made it clear that I have been leading the process with a “bottom up approach” – in other words, starting the process by dealing with practical and “status-neutral” issues, issues that have to be solved under any circumstances.

So, apart from decentralization, we will run in due course parallel discussions on Cultural and Religious Heritage, Minority Rights and Economy.

On Minority Rights, I had sent a questionnaire to both Belgrade and Pristina on February 10th, seeking their views in this area that I believe needs to be addressed as part of the

status process. Yesterday, I received a response from the Negotiation Team of Kosovo and I am looking forward to hearing from Belgrade soon. As a matter of fact I had put a deadline on the 3rd.

In order to make your life easier I don't need to get any questions on that, because I haven't had the chance to read the answers that I received yesterday so I have no comment to make on the content. I want to study them carefully when I get back to Vienna.

During my trip to Lipjan, I was encouraged by the efforts being made in the area of improving relations between majority and minority communities. However, I also see that a lot of more needs to be done. I have urged the leaders from all communities - and I emphasize the word ALL -, all communities, especially of course the majority, to be generous towards others: changing people's attitude does not cost a penny. You should do it for the interest of all the people in Kosovo, not because we in the international community are asking for it.

Next week, Ladies and Gentleman, as a matter of fact on Sunday, already I am traveling to New York to meet with the Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Monday and then meeting the Security Council on Tuesday. My plan is to travel on Wednesday to Washington DC to meet the US government and visit also the International financial institutions. And I of course plan to continue my visits to Pristina and Belgrade and when I come here I hope I can report progress on the ground.

I am ready to take your questions

Q: (AP): Going back to the government overhaul, the political overhaul in Kosovo, do you really believe it will not impact the Status Talks?

Martti Ahtisaari: I honestly don't believe that it will because the working groups have been established the political groups are there, so I hope we can proceed with the speed I want to carry out this exercise and I have been assured that the Government will fully cooperate with us.

Q: (Koha Ditore): Can you tell us why in Belgrade you planned to meet tête-à-tête, with President Tadic and the President of the Government Mr. Kostunica, why as well there were their counselors and they were not alone at the meeting?

Martti Ahtisaari: I always plan to have a private meeting, or tête-à-tête, with my interlocutors. I had that this time, I had one of them this time and he had one. I think it may very well be that this sort of working matter is extremely helpful and I am going to utilize that in the future as well. I'm a guest and I asked for a private meeting. I think it's good. We had a photo opportunity for your photographers afterwards. We sat in a conference room, but we had discussed all issues that need to be discussed in our private meeting. There was nothing dramatic in that. I have known Prime Minister Kostunica for

quite a number of years but we haven't seen each other for a long time and I think it is important that we have a chance to see each other. Perhaps to learn to know each other again. I had other private meetings, I saw the Deputy Prime Minister Labus also. I had lunch with him in a restaurant, so it wasn't particularly private but we had a good discussion on important issues.

Q: Mr. Ahtisaari, you have mentioned that during this break till March 17th you are going to send Belgrade and Pristina. Could you tell us about their role. Why are you sending expert teams to Belgrade and Pristina?

Martti Ahtisaari: As I said the idea behind that is that they will talk to their colleagues both here and Pristina and Belgrade and prepare the next round of talks, because 20th February was the first one and it was then agreed that we should send those experts, those are actually coming from my office they are my colleagues who are involved so experts and experts, I think we all try to claim that we are experts, I should have said perhaps that those are my colleagues whose responsibility is to further these talks. So that gives us an additional opportunity to have a preliminary discussion before we come together in Vienna

Q: (AP) Is it getting any clear the outlines of the final deal in your head, are the pieces of puzzle coming together as far as you are concerned? And secondly, with half of the team you started off this process in Pristina has changed, how can you say that you don't expect any big changes?

Martti Ahtisaari: I have been a civil servant, I have been around for perhaps too long and I have seen governments coming and going and changing in my own country and elsewhere. I sometimes had to deal with a process that lasted for 13 years, and governments changed, elections took place, my interlocutors changed and we kept on pushing with that process. So, I always say that the hosts are all living their own lives and the visitors have to adjust to that. So I don't think that these changes will have a dramatic effect. Next time when I come here, if we come to a conclusion you can criticize me if I was not right. But my feeling from the discussions I have had made me say what I said earlier. I don't think I have started to collect the pieces yet. Bare with me, we will need to go through this phase carefully because we need process on the ground as I said then we will start looking at those issues, but it's not the time yet.

Q: (Reuters): Mr. Ahtisaari do you expect the Contact Group to refine its stance on Kosovo's final status even further in the near future, you spoke in Belgrade about private messages but do you expect the CG to come publicly soon and define its stance even further?

Martti Ahtisaari: No, I can't speak for the CG, I work closely with them and they have promised their support for my team and myself so I have no information to give you, you have to address the CG representatives on that. I think, I'm quite comfortable on what has happened so far has created good basis for us to do our work at the moment and we have to start looking at those concrete issues, so we have to do our homework on a number of

issues and only then can we start bringing the parties together. And that process is now going. All my aides are working on it.

Q: (Kim Radio): Mr. Ahtisaari, could you please tell us concretely what is your opinion on the appointment of Agim Çeku for the new Kosovo Prime Minister baring in mind that Kosovo-Serb community had reservations. As you know the Serb authorities have issued a warrant for this gentleman for the alleged committed war crimes against population in former Yugoslavia.

Martti Ahtisaari: I hope we all agree that everyone who lives in this society has a right to say what they think about their political leaders, and the political parties have the right to organize their work as they like. I have no opinion, I don't need to have, I never have. In the business where I am, where I am very often pestered not only here, elsewhere as well what I think about this or that government. I say my task is to deal with the government that happens to be there, and to make the best out of that, and my attitude hasn't changed. It is right of the political system to decide what sort of government, what sort of leadership there might be and it's up to the citizens also to express their opinions. My task is to work those who are actually appointed by the political system. I will only say what I think of my own government. That right I have as a citizen of my country.

Q: Mr. Ahtisaari many times you said, your contract with the UN will expire in December this year are you still on those positions??

Martti Ahtisaari: Yes, I haven't received a new contract yet. I'm having a meeting with Kofi Annan on Monday, so lets see whether he tries to cut it shorter or.... I don't think its time to discuss what will happen in the Autumn. I'm quite relaxed in the sense that I don't think that peace is depending on one person only. I have an excellent team working with me. I always try to collect a group of people that I feel comfortable working with and I have done that at the moment as well.

Q: Mr. Ahtisaari after this three-day visit in Pristina are you even more convinced in the justification of more experient finish of the negotiation? And by when can we expect the final and concrete results concerning the technical issues of decentralization?

Martti Ahtisaari: I'm only convinced of one thing: that we have a task and I and my colleagues will carry out as expeditiously as we can, and much will depend on the parties. It's not only the talks, I think, let's be absolutely clear on this: If what happens on the ground in Kosovo can be not only me, my task is to give my opinion to the Secretary-General and Security Council. Søren Jessen-Petersen, as special representative has his task to report to the Security Council and Secretary-General what is happening. I hope that we can both report positive changes in a society, because we are all engaged in that. When can we have sort of a final word from Vienna? I think this will continue, as I said, we will discuss a number of other issues, not only about the decentralization but perhaps under this general cover of decentralization. So it will take some time. I have said publicly that before the Summer, I want to take stock and see where we are. We lost a

little bit of time. There wasn't anything anyone could do, we had the mourning period of President Rugova and we definitely didn't want to do anything then except to prepare ourselves for our tasks. Perhaps that was the best tribute to him. So we will continue and you will hear when the smoke is coming out of the chimney, that we have made some progress. But it's also so that in these type of negotiations we will mostly see that we may start discussing some other issues and return to some of those that we have talked earlier. If there is anytime for the one or other delegation to need more time for consultations. But we try to let you know if we can see some progress on the issues.

Q: (RTK) Mr Ahtisaari, I am interested to know from you whether the Kosovar part is on good track to achieve its goal, that is: the independence?

Martti Ahtisaari: Before I even start discussing that track we have a lot of things to do. We are now engaged in trying to see how we can improve the situation on the ground. As I said, these are status neutral issue. Whatever the status might be, these are issues that are to be addressed, under any circumstances. So will actually decide the timeframe for our discussions. And later on this year we can start raising the type of question that you are now raising. In general I would say that my colleagues and I were pleased with the first round of talks. We have now started the process and that is a good thing and both sides seem to be prepared to move forward.

Q: At the first meeting in Vienna the Kosovo delegation endeavoured that the realization of the decentralization process starts after the determination of the status. The Belgrade delegation asked for a faster implementation. Do you see a possibility for a compromise between these two completely opposed requests?

Martti Ahtisaari: I think I have made it clear that there are a number of things where we have to see progress on the ground. There are issues where legislative changes are needed and [where] the implementation of new laws has to take place. A lot of things have to happen actually before we move into the status phase. If one wants to move within the timeframe that the Contact Group also has envisioned, then one has to start moving, preferably yesterday, but at least tomorrow.

Q: (AP) Going back to your visit here, you went to Lipjan. Can you just tell us: What did you see here what did you see in this Serb majority municipality? You said that you were listening to them. What did you hear? Are you going back with more information have you crystallised a bit your opinion?

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all, it was a constructive meeting, like with the Association of municipalities as well. Very matter of fact. I also indicated to both groups that in the future I would like to visit some of their areas. Lipjan suited, it was close and I could do it within the timeframe that I had. But we are coming back and on those trips that I told the mayors I would see certain areas. I cannot go to every municipality, that is not possible, but I will choose hopefully representative examples and visit them.

Q: Will this sort of visit form your opinion about the final deal? Is this the level where you want to see progress, or on the central level?

Martti Ahtisaari: There have to be on both central and local levels. As I said earlier, I think you heard me saying that there are issues where I would like to see progress on the central level and on the ground, on the local level. And then there are issues where mechanisms have to be in place, hopefully also progress on certain difficult issues and these processes will nevertheless continue. And then there are issues that will take much more time than we are now talking about. But I think it is extremely important that I do not only visit the capital but I will have a chance - not only me but my colleagues as well. I am actually in the lucky position that I have people who have lived here and have visited most of the country, so we are covering the place rather well. But I personally want to touch base with some municipalities.

Q: (RTK): Your deputy Mr Rohan in Vienna indicated that cohabitation rather than multi-ethnicity would be an option for the kind of arrangement between the ethnic communities in Kosovo. Judging from what you have seen in the last three days on the field, is this a more viable option for you?

Martti Ahtisaari: Look, I think everyone would like to see a multi-ethnic society. And, I do not know... Where do you come from?

RTK: Mitrovica. North.

Martti Ahtisaari: I was wondering whether you were coming from here [in Kosovo] or from somewhere else. Good. I have lived in my life in different places in the world and sometimes I have a feeling the only thing where we really mix in the culinary services of different nationalities. But I hope that we go beyond the co-habitation. I would like to be able to develop a society where everyone can feel free. I emphasized with my interlocutors the fact that when I travel around the world I hear from everywhere that people want to be treated fairly by police and courts. If those two things are functioning, in any society you feel free to move around without being arrested, without fear, and I think that is a very important element in any society. And then you can go around your life and do what you feel comfortable of doing within the laws of the country. I do not think we should put any stamps or titles. I think we should try to create conditions in this society like anywhere else where people can feel comfortable and also respect their own cultural heritage and share the life with everybody else in the society. Let's not forget that there is a number of minorities in this society. I met the others as well yesterday. I always try to meet them, even if they are consulted by the process, which is very good. I would also hope that in the future the women whom I met, and others in this society who are qualified, could play a more important role in the society because I was really impressed by the ladies who came to see me today. Thank you very much on that happy note. I wish you good luck.

One think: I was just handed over by Hua Jiang the preliminary answer from Belgrade to my questionnaire. But I have not even read the letter yet, so... You will hear in due course from us. Thank you.