

**STATEMENT BY ZAHIR TANIN, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HEAD OF UNMIK
SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE ON UNMIK**

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Mr President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

You have before you, the latest quarterly report of the Secretary-General and today I will share with you my assessment of the situation as well as an overview of UNMIK's recalibrated work priorities.

When I last briefed you in May, the situation reflected a degree of uncertainty about the prospects for decisive progress in the EU-facilitated political dialogue. However, after leaders from Belgrade and Pristina met in June and July, prospects for renewed negotiations began to be explored. At the European Forum Alpbach in Austria in August, both sides advocated a new framework for a comprehensive agreement, including the possibility of territorial exchange.

The addition of this new dimension generated new impetus, as well as apprehension among political actors and the populations on both sides as well as within the region and international community. Regardless of the underlying challenges and concerns, the discussion has opened space for debate and consideration.

Last week in Brussels, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and the President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi met and confirmed their mutual intention to continue the dialogue, and to work toward a settlement, within the EU-facilitated process.

Mr President,

The political talks in Brussels took place against a situation still dominated by frequent adversarial actions on the ground, many of which carry real consequences for the populations. Actions which attempt to pre-empt agreement are not conducive to achieving political compromise. Whether on larger or smaller issues, one-sided actions carry the constant potential to inflame the situation on the ground.

I refer to a number of broad areas, including infrastructure, energy, and the economy. Individuals continue to face challenges to exercising their basic rights, including the rights of freedom of movement, religious practice, and equal access to economic opportunities. In a recent development, the announcement by the Kosovo government that a ten per cent tax would be imposed on Serbian and Bosnian goods further increased tensions between Pristina and Belgrade and created instability for business and people. The Government of Serbia denounced the measure as damaging to the normalisation of relations and as a violation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement.

I would like to underline that needed reform in Kosovo's rule of law institutions has been undermined by ethnic tension and by political agendas. The resignation of a Kosovo Special Prosecutor, over alleged threats connected to

investigation of major cases, led to public protests and harmed public confidence in the strength and impartiality of the justice system.

Naturally, protecting the independence of the judiciary and fighting organised crime and corruption require continuous and strenuous effort, in Kosovo as they do everywhere. The European Union and the United Nations continue to place resources at the disposal of the authorities to help in this difficult but essential endeavor.

The wider context of the political dialogue process between the parties may sometimes be overshadowed by this array of unresolved problems, posturing and jousting. The European perspective itself continues to provide a significant source of motivation for political leaders on both sides, and in so doing helps promote continued peace and stability. Support and assistance from the European Union is essential to strengthen capacity across Kosovo's public institutions, and the European Commission, on the 19th of July, took a momentous step in affirming that benchmarks have been met for Kosovo's Roadmap on Visa Liberalisation, proposing to the European Parliament and European Council to lift visa requirements and allow visa-free travel for residents of Kosovo.

Let me underline, with all the focus on possibilities for a new political compromise, we should not fail to account for the forward movement accomplished since April 2013, and the central tenets of the First Agreement signed at that time, which included establishing the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities. These tenets, and their full implementation, are integral to any new agreement, and to progress on the ground.

Mr President,

The recent approval by the Assembly of Kosovo of three draft laws on the Kosovo Security Force that aim to significantly enhance the strength and responsibilities of the Force, has caused renewed tensions. This matter needs to be handled with utmost care, to ensure that steps taken are the result of a fully inclusive, fully representative political process respecting relevant legal frameworks.

Mr President,

Any process of political negotiation, if it is to succeed, requires the full engagement and buy-in from societies, as well as from leaders and political representatives. Top-level commitments that may be reached via political negotiations, no matter the strength of international and regional support, are unlikely to stand unless backed up by full understanding and confidence among communities and individuals across society. I am confident that leaders on both sides, as well as the facilitators of the dialogue, have this firmly in mind.

With this in mind, UNMIK continues to prioritise trust-building in Kosovo particularly at the grassroots level, whenever and wherever possible, in close cooperation with all international partners on the ground. I have set Engagement, Empowerment and Creativity as core objectives of our interaction and work with Kosovo society.

As I have previously highlighted to the Council, UNMIK has re-aligned its focus and priorities toward promoting longer-term reconciliation at multiple levels in Kosovo. Without societal reconciliation, involving people, communities and civil society, progress can falter, regardless of the best efforts and work of political stakeholders. Trust-building requires patience and persistence, to raise and empower the voices of understanding and compassion, that may help shape a future different from divisions and conflict.

Following the United Nations Kosovo Trust-building Forum held in Ljubljana in May, we have worked systematically to identify, support and empower change-makers across Kosovo and to facilitate the implementation of initiatives outlined by the participants in the Forum. UNMIK, in collaboration with the UN Kosovo Team and other international partners, is focused on realising the recommendations from the Trust-building Forum, which include a number of concrete measures for this year and beyond. The action plan encompasses a series of important measures, ranging from involving all segments of Kosovo society in an informed debate about the future to influencing the agendas of local and international partners in the areas of inter-community trust and cooperation.

Other key objectives of the Mission's ongoing work include promoting use of innovative communication technologies to support constant interaction of all groups and communities across Kosovo, addressing outstanding issues within the framework of justice; human rights; the Women, Peace and Security agenda; as well as the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. I would like to emphasise that UNMIK's strategic frameworks on women and youth represent a bold step towards supporting the empowerment of women and young people in Kosovo.

These efforts are designed to encourage an environment conducive to peace and reconciliation, healing historical mistrust, and building bridges of common interest among communities. This is fully in line with the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative and may offer an important example of how to tap into the potential of people and partnerships to create necessary conditions for sustaining peace.

Our international partnerships remain vital in this effort. During the year, the Mission reinforced its functional collaboration with the EU Office, EULEX, OSCE, KFOR, Council of Europe and other international presences, together with our core partners in the UN Kosovo Team. Besides my regular consultations in Belgrade, Pristina, and regional capitals, I have made particular efforts to share our perspective and experience with stakeholders in Europe and beyond.

Mr President,

In each of the areas of the Mission's recalibrated work, as I have today described, UNMIK is working in line with the core principles of the Secretary-General's reform agenda and the guidance of the Council. Our efforts are aimed at helping to boost the conditions for peaceful negotiation and societal reconciliation. At the same time, we are working to remain at the forefront of understanding, to help the Council, and to share our understanding and our work with all partners in the service of a lasting peace.

I thank you, Mr President, and the members of the Council for your continuing support.