

As delivered

**SRSG CAROLINE ZIADEH STATEMENT TO THE
SECURITY COUNCIL**

New York

8 FEBRUARY 2024

Madame President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Distinguished Representatives,

Let me start by thanking you Madame President for this opportunity to brief the Council on the latest developments in Kosovo.

Almost one year ago, two agreements were reached, in Brussels on 27 February, and in Ohrid on 18 March, setting forth a pathway toward negotiations and mutual engagement. However, with disagreement on the sequencing of the implementation, progress was stalled. Subsequent developments such as the by-elections in four municipalities in northern Kosovo, resulting in Mayors elected by barely 3.47% of eligible voters, the ensuing clashes around those municipality buildings on 29 May that resulted in significant injuries to civilians and to 93 KFOR personnel, and the serious security incident in Banjska/Banjskë on 24 September – still under investigation – that led to fatalities; were serious setbacks.

Despite some positive momentum that re-emerged at the end of last year with progress achieved over vehicle license plates, the “energy roadmap”, customs documentation and the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the initiation of the referendum to recall the mayors, unilateral actions on issues that clearly fall

within the political dialogue process and its governing agreements are cause for great concern. Regardless which side takes them and what justifications are provided, and in the absence of unambiguous public communications, such actions predictably exacerbate an environment of insecurity and mistrust.

Madame President,

Recently, on 27 December 2023, the Central Bank Board of Kosovo adopted a regulation and announced that, as of 1 February 2024, the only currency allowed for cash transactions in Kosovo will be the Euro. Limited public explanation was offered, despite the fact that, since 1999, the dinar has served as the *de facto* primary currency for cash and commercial transactions in Kosovo-Serb majority areas. Tens of thousands of individuals are affected, as is the economy, which depends upon their purchasing power.

More specifically, the regulation interrupts the payment to individuals employed by Serbian-funded institutions in Kosovo, certain agricultural and social welfare subsidies, and recipients of pensions. Small and medium-scale businesses, health and education services, including childcare will also be severely affected, as they have for long also used to receive their funds from Serbia.

This decision, particularly as related to the short deadline of its entry into force, and the affected individual's future access to basic economic and social services, became a matter of concern for local communities and international interlocutors.

Subsequently, and in response to the obvious concerns this has raised, the Kosovo authorities on 6 February announced a transitional period of one month for implementation, accompanied by a communications campaign. Yet, not all concerns seem to be addressed regarding the cash flow in dinars, as a cash-

transfer truck was prevented entry into Kosovo on 7 February, while four million dinars confiscated by the Kosovo police on 3 February in Pejë/Peć Municipality, still awaits judicial and administrative action.

Madame President,

As highlighted by many international partners, such issues fall under the Brussels Agreements of 2013 and 2015, in which the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities in Kosovo was decided upon.

I would like to reiterate, Madame President, that actions regardless of their legality and justification must take into consideration their impact on affected population. Otherwise, such actions not only increase tensions, but also weaken the potential for lasting peace and security across all communities in Kosovo. In the spirit of conflict prevention, more should be done to win the hearts and minds of non-majority communities.

Madame President,

On 26 January and 2 February, Kosovo police conducted operations targeting facilities used by the Serbian non-majority communities in the Municipalities of Dragash/Dragaš, Pejë/Peć, Klinë/Klina, and Istog/Istok, as well as a community health centre in Pristina. The Kosovo police announced that in all four municipal locations, various documents were seized, buildings were sealed, staff were taken into custody for questioning and later released.

Also, during an earlier police operation in Pejë/Peć on 2 January, a team of journalists from Radio Goraždevac, the only Kosovo-Serbian media outlet in that region, reported being stopped and searched despite having presented valid press credentials. As you know Madame President UNMIK and our main partners place

the highest importance upon ensuring the freedom of the media and expression at all times.

Madame President,

Neither the Central Bank of Kosovo's new regulation, nor these recent Kosovo police operations, have contributed to de-escalation, as repeatedly called for by international interlocutors.

In that regard, I cannot overstate the critical deterrent role KFOR continues to play on the ground today.

Madame President,

In all my statements including the latest on 6 February, I reaffirmed the importance of upholding the rule of law free from political influence and also reiterated that all related actions must be anchored in the principles of human rights. I will continue to call on both Pristina and Belgrade to engage actively, and in good faith, in the EU-facilitated Dialogue, as the venue for tackling the most sensitive policy issues that affect the communities.

It is crucial that efforts towards negotiated, and mutually accepted solutions do not falter. Continuous effort to build greater mutual trust and respect are the only viable path to stability, prosperity, and security. Madame President, history has repeatedly shown that just solutions do not emerge from unilateral actions, but rather from a sustained and painstaking commitment to open communication and dialogue.

We will continue our efforts to encourage all stakeholders to prioritize trust and building it, not only at the grassroots levels, but at all levels, including between communities and institutions. Trust develops only in an atmosphere that

fosters mutual respect, open communication, fairness and both the perception and the reality of equal treatment.

In closing, let us remember again that the only acceptable path ahead is one that is grounded in dialogue and compromise, embraces human rights, and ensures the equitable application of the rule of law. I can assure you Madame President that UNMIK remains committed to providing good offices towards this ultimate goal.

Thank you.