

**STATEMENT BY CAROLINE ZIADEH, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HEAD OF UNMIK**

SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON UNMIK

New York

30 OCTOBER 2024

Thank you, President. If I may, I would like to congratulate you and your country Switzerland, as well as your team, for your deft presidency during this month.

Madam President, Excellencies,

Distinguished members of the Security Council, ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is my honor to update the Council on the latest developments in Kosovo since the issuance of the report of the Secretary-General, which covers the period from 16 March to 15 September this year, and to share a few overarching observations.
2. In my engagements with officials in Belgrade and Pristina, as well as with local political and civil actors, and with international partners, I hear, and I am sharing what I heard, I hear an aspiration for a constructive dialogue and peaceful relations, although the situation on the ground remains fragile, and progress tentative.
3. During my latest visit to northern Kosovo in September, civil society organisations, political actors, and residents alike, voiced serious concerns about the adverse impact of recent unilateral actions affecting their economic, social and political rights. They explained that the recent closures of Post of Serbia branches and municipal offices run by the Government of Serbia, including the latest in Skenderaj/Srbica on the 16th

of October, have limited access to key services, in particular for the Kosovo Serb community. These difficulties compounded the effect of earlier measures, like the regulation on the use of Dinar and the closure of Postanska Stedionica Savings Bank branches. These community members further voiced anxiety over indications that the Pristina authorities may attempt to assert control over the Serbia-funded education and health institutions.

Madam President,

4. Amid discourse earlier this summer on reopening the Ibar bridge to vehicle traffic, and in response to an increased number of arrests of Kosovo Serbs for alleged public order offenses, we have observed a notable rise in civic activism in northern Kosovo, including among women's groups and university students. In this regard, I must voice concern over the arrests of individuals for exercising their freedom of expression and assembly.
5. In recent weeks, there have been a number of allegations of excessive use of force and ill-treatment by police during arrests and in police custody in northern Kosovo. There are now ongoing investigations by the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo regarding these allegations. Making the findings of the Inspectorate publicly available, once concluded, could be a helpful step towards building trust in the institutions. Here, I note that a few minutes ago, the Inspectorate just recommended the suspension of two police officers involved in the detention of a Kosovo Serb in Saint Lazar Square on the 26th of October.

Madam President,

6. Advancing and safeguarding human rights is at the very core of our mission in Kosovo. Against the background of recent developments, strengthening measures to further promote equality and non-discrimination are pivotal, in particular in upholding property rights, preserving cultural heritage, and fully observing the language rights of all communities. I welcome the efforts of the Ombudsperson to engage with diverse communities, and encourage him, and his team, to continue fulfilling their mandate independently.
7. I also welcome some recent progress made by the Working Group on Missing Persons and continued endeavors to meet the expectations of families, whose ongoing grief weigh heavily on the social fabric.

Madam President,

8. A year since the serious security incident in Banjska/Banjskë, I continue to call for timely accountability for perpetrators through thorough, fair, transparent and independent judicial processes, which are essential for fostering stability. Such act of violence is unacceptable and must not be repeated. In this regard, we note that the initial hearing on this case was conducted on the 9th of October at the basic court of Pristina against the three defendants who are in custody, out of a total of 45 accused in the indictment, who face a range of charges, including terrorism.

Madam President,

9. The chief negotiators met in Brussels last Thursday under the facilitation of the European Union. The decision to establish a working group to facilitate entry of certain perishable products and the advancement of energy interconnection are welcome developments. Intensifying efforts to achieve concrete results from the EU-facilitated dialogue is essential. This dialogue, which we strongly support, remains central to resolving outstanding issues, including the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities. Success will be achieved through constructive, open approaches and respect for the hard-won agreements forged over a number of years. I believe both sides recognise that meaningful progress toward decisive political outcomes must be built upon the confidence gained from achieving attainable goals. Here, I welcome the Kosovo Judicial Council's prudent stance on keeping the door open for the potential return of Kosovo Serb judges, in line with the standing EU-facilitated agreements.

Madame President,

10. The lifting of the ban on the entry of goods from Serbia on 8th of October, accompanied by consensus on Central European Free Trade Agreement procedures, resulted in nine agreements aimed at boosting regional economic prosperity. Serbian goods have now resumed crossing into Kosovo. It is imperative that the current bottlenecks will be expeditiously addressed. This recent progress underscores the potential for deeper work toward regional integration via constructive diplomatic compromises and consensus.

11. The envisioned release of initial funds from the growth plan, following the European Commission's adoption of the reform agendas presented by the governments in the Western Balkans, encourages momentum to further advance and strengthen regional integration and cooperation.

Madam President,

12. Trust-building at all levels remains the cornerstone of a shared and better future for all. The finding of the recent Trust Index report, conducted by a local NGO as part of the UNMIK-supported Barabar project, highlights the lack of confidence in institutions and increasing pessimism about the future of inter-communal trust. And yet, and with that said, most Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb respondents see reconciliation as essential for a better future for coming generations, highlighting the importance, perhaps now more than ever, of active trust-building work to achieve progress.
13. Accordingly, our mission remains dedicated to fostering efforts on the ground that aim to build trust across communities, including in the areas of Human Rights, Rule of Law, Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security.
14. As part of our commitment to encourage the meaningful participation of women and youth in political processes, UNMIK recently supported high-level discussions on promoting gender equality within the dialogue. These exchanges produced specific recommendations for gender-inclusive governance and decision-making. Additionally, building on the successful

organization of the regional 6th UN Youth Assembly, 130 local and regional youth delegates participated in the “Youth, Peace and Security in the AI Era” event which took place in Kosovo last May 2024. UNMIK continues to organise workshops to equip young people from diverse communities in Kosovo with skills to counter misinformation and disinformation.

Madam President,

15. With the pre-electoral campaign period fast approaching, it is crucial for political leaders and all sectors of society to create an environment where voters feel confident, engaged, and assured that participation, by all communities - including Kosovo Serb community in the north - can lead to meaningful outcomes. This means ensuring the peaceful exercise of the right to vote as an element of the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs. It also means ensuring conditions for broad participation, achievable only when people feel safe, respected, and empowered.

Madam President,

16. It was only last month when all of you met in the General Assembly during the High-Level week. World leaders, during said week, highlighted the need for collective action to promote peace, sustainable development, and human dignity. All those values hold profound significance in Kosovo and the region. Such values are at risk, if actions are taken that threaten rights, freedoms, and livelihoods among diverse communities. I, therefore, from

this Council, urge all parties equally to heed the Secretary-General's call for responsible leadership, to ensure that these shared values are upheld in spirit and in practice.

Before I conclude, Madam President,

17. Allow me to acknowledge the significant contribution of the outgoing Commander of the Kosovo Force, General Özkan Ulutaş, whose leadership was instrumental in managing various crises. I also warmly welcome his successor, General Enrico Barduani, with whom I look forward to working closely.

Madame President,

18. I appeal to members of the Security Council to remain steadfast in your commitment to peace, stability, and cooperation in Kosovo, and express my deep appreciation for your continued support to UNMIK. By working together, we can help to propel constructive political dialogue, protect fundamental rights, and promote a more lasting security and prosperity for all, and I thank you.