

**STATEMENT BY CAROLINE ZIADEH,  
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AND HEAD OF UNMIK  
SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE ON UNMIK  
New York  
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Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I am honoured to be with you today, as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIK, to thank you for your ongoing support and to brief you on the Mission's operations during the past six months, taking account of developments in the region since the end of the official reporting period. As I brief you today, developments in Ukraine inevitably have, and will continue, to influence all issues of European security, including in the Mission's area of operations.

I am as well briefing you today on the heels of the Serbian elections, conducted on 3 April. Although the final results are pending, the overall outcome is clear. The current majority party in Serbia retains a secure public mandate. It is worth noting that the ruling coalition in Pristina also presently enjoys a comfortable majority in parliament. Such circumstances can sometimes lend themselves to courageous leadership decisions.

In the lead-up to the Serbian general elections, the international community had urged Pristina and Belgrade authorities to agree on modalities to facilitate eligible voters' participation in Kosovo. This would have been in line with the practice of

preceding years. This time, a solution was not identified to permit this. Together with my international colleagues, and the representatives of various Member States, I regretted the polarising effects of this decision, since it divided public opinion sharply along ethnic lines. Nevertheless, more than 19,000 voters from Kosovo did participate by casting their vote at special polling stations established in Serbia. Thanks to an impressive logistical exercise facilitated with support from both sides, the election process passed smoothly and without any incident. The resilience of democratic institutions throughout the Balkans region is a crucial factor in the maintenance of a secure and democratic Europe. Earlier this month, I met with the re-elected President of Serbia, as well as other government leaders in Belgrade. I was encouraged by the very direct and open conversations I had there.

Mr. President,

Unfortunately, incidents of serious concern took place only a few days ago in northern Kosovo, with attacks apparently directly targeting Kosovo police patrols. Gunshots were fired at the patrols, along with stones and pyrotechnic devices thrown. While the motive is yet unknown, these criminal attacks were brazen. I have urged the public at large, and officials on all sides, to join in condemning such violence, and to provide any information they may have to law enforcement so that those responsible are swiftly identified and brought to justice.

Today, I wish to call upon the leaders of both Pristina and Belgrade to be very judicious in their actions and in their political rhetoric. During such complex days, these leaders bear the main responsibility for reducing tensions rather than fuelling them. This applies at the political level and, equally, in the public arena. For these reasons, I have also urged both sides to engage constructively and more

actively in the EU-facilitated dialogue. I have received reassurances of this commitment during my recent meetings.

I have yet to be provided the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister or President in Pristina, and this, of course, is an important prerequisite for constructive and positive engagement. I have, however, met with most leaders from across the political spectrum in Pristina, including those from the parties in power, those in opposition, and political independents. I will also regularly reach out to leaders in other parts of the Balkan neighbourhood to hear their perspectives on relations with Kosovo and on the dialogue. I am sure that the political actors in the region will demonstrate in deeds their understanding that dialogue and compromise represent the only viable path toward stability, prosperity, and security for all.

Mr President,

Yesterday marked the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations. While this process has led to meaningful results on various practical matters, a comprehensive normalisation of relations between the two sides so far continues to be elusive.

Even on extremely technical subjects discussed during this reporting period, such as vehicle registration plates, progress remains tentative and slow. As we meet here today, we cannot be sure whether Belgrade and Pristina will achieve an agreed solution on that matter by tomorrow's deadline. I would like to encourage Pristina and Belgrade proactively to seek a permanent solution to the vehicle license issue, along with other issues concerning the freedom of movement as well as the energy agreements. Whatever the pace of discussions -- which we hope will increase -- another principle bears re-emphasising: However difficult

the path toward agreements and solutions, unilateral actions -- from any side -- have the potential to damage the real interests of the people on both sides.

Mr President,

Dramatic shocks to Kosovo's and other regional economies were building up well before the onset of events in Ukraine. Following two years of the global COVID-19 pandemic, economies have been struggling to first manage, then recover from that disease's profound effects on health as well as social and economic well-being. Inflation, supply shortages, rising interest rates, and increasing debt burdens were already occurring, and have since been exacerbated. In this context, finding practical modes of economic cooperation between Belgrade, Pristina, and all the neighbours of the region, assumes greater urgency. Any region-wide initiatives which can help toward promoting this objective should be welcomed. Reducing restrictions on the movements of people, and the flows of goods and capital, can only help all neighbours in the region weather current and future challenges.

Mr President,

Since my arrival in Pristina, I have witnessed first-hand the internal and external challenges which weigh upon Kosovo's political leadership. The expectations for progress and reform are exceptionally high. This government will depend both upon wise decision-making as well as strong international support to fulfil its ambitious agenda and deliver for the people.

It is logical then that the subject of improving relationships sits atop the agenda for so many of Kosovo's regional and international interlocutors. Reconciliation

and addressing the grievances of the past should reinforce the pursuit of important strategic objectives.

Mr President,

Allow me, at the outset of my mandate, to be very clear about two important points. First: as Belgrade and Pristina each know well, my responsibility is to offer objective information to the Secretary-General and the Security Council. I will remain always open to listening to all views; however, the contents of the Secretary-General's reports are not the subject of negotiation with any parties. Second: UNMIK is not a determinant factor -- nor the spokesperson of any particular view -- regarding a just and lasting settlement between parties. This is not our role. Too often since my arrival, I have heard insinuations that UNMIK, in and of itself, represents either an obstacle or a vehicle for the outcome preferred by one or the other side. Or that UNMIK itself harbours a particular agenda to forward or favour, outside the bounds of its mandate to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo. Neither of these inaccurate perceptions contain any demonstrable truth, yet both have too frequently been allowed to gain currency in local public discourse.

Accordingly, we will continue our work in the areas where we are genuinely able to help forward the common objectives held by authorities, communities and institutions in Kosovo. UNMIK's legacy of institutional support, its trust among communities and political actors, and its work with the full spectrum of multilateral and bilateral actors, will drive my Mission's agenda. Naturally, this includes working in synergy with the United Nations family of agencies, funds and programmes, and in partnership with the international community.

Progress in high-level political discussions, in particular the EU-facilitated dialogue, can be supported and aided by intensified people-to-people work on the ground. My Mission remains a locus of relevant knowledge, experience, and subject area expertise, which serves Kosovo's institutions and communities. Supporting an active civil society; promoting new tools to help Kosovo reinforce the rule of law; contributing to the empowerment of women and youth; providing expertise and support to human rights mechanisms: all these will remain major priorities. Of course, we will continue to explore all areas where we can make fruitful contributions under the mandate which you have given to us.

Mr President,

I wish to close by saying that the Council's support to our Mission remains essential. Equally important is your attention to the state of relations between Pristina and Belgrade, even though we realise that many new and difficult situations demand your attention. Our efforts as a Mission will remain focussed on contributing to stability, political progress, respect for human rights, supporting the women, peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas, and promoting greater inter-community trust and dialogue -- in Kosovo, and in the region.

On behalf of all the Mission staff, I thank you for your continuing support to UNMIK.