

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

**New York**

**14 May 2018**

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

As reflected in the Secretary-General's Report, this past period in Kosovo was generally characterised by a decline in both the quality of actions and the tenor of political discourse between Pristina and Belgrade. In March tentative but important meetings of the EU-facilitated dialogue took place, held at technical and political levels. This working atmosphere was affected when Marko Đurić, the Director of Serbia's Kosovo office and Belgrade's lead negotiator for the EU-facilitated dialogue, was arrested after entering northern Kosovo against the advice of Kosovo authorities to attend a session of President Aleksandar Vučić's internal dialogue. During the arrest action, stun grenades, disabling gas and other physical force were deployed, resulting in a number of injuries, including to an attending Minister of the Government of Kosovo, two municipal leaders, journalists, and other attendees. Mr Đurić was then theatrically and improperly paraded through a street in Pristina before being expelled from Kosovo. Many Kosovo Serbs, already unsettled by the unsolved murder case of Oliver Ivanović in Mitrovica in January, perceived these events with apprehension.

Following the incident, political figures from both sides engaged in rhetorical escalation that led to further setbacks in the effort to continue the EU-facilitated dialogue. The Kosovo Serb caucus, Serbian List, announced its intention to withdraw from Pristina's coalition government. Moreover, they

stated the intention to form unilaterally the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities, setting a deadline of 20 April, which, however, was subsequently recanted. Whichever factors drove the series of reciprocal taunts, the results seemed close to precipitating the collapse of the government in Kosovo. The waters were only calmed again with intensive efforts, including with some support from external parties. Most importantly, significant efforts made by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and his government, including protracted discussions with the Serbian List and other parts of the coalition, as well as opposition, have helped to keep the channels of communication open.

Madam President,

There has been discussion over many months about the prospects of a shift in the essentially-frozen positions of both sides through the new EU focus on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and on wider regional engagement. Despite these expectations, recent rising political temperatures have created hurdles in advancing the dialogue that requires sufficient political will from either or both sides to bring a new level of engagement to bolster the process. There is no other viable option. However, for that to happen there is a clear need for exercising leadership to stand up to challenges even with short-term political costs. A new focus by Brussels at all levels provides a mutually beneficial opportunity for Pristina and Belgrade to leave the current difficult moment behind and to take the dialogue to the next stage of real progress. Moreover, member states of the European Union have set an ambitious calendar for the region, including the EU Western Balkans Summit in Sofia later this month, the highest-level regional summit since 2003. Additionally the next crucial meeting of the Berlin Process economic forum in July, alongside many other initiatives

this year to engage the Western Balkans more intensively, would help all to navigate cross-currents and take advantage of a new commitment.

Madam President,

As much as top-level political assurances remain essential, commitments made in negotiations are unlikely to endure without some impetus for confidence among communities and individuals at the grassroots level. To create the atmosphere for reason and good-faith compromise to prevail, engagement is needed across all levels, which remains a main priority of the Mission. I am pleased to inform the Council that I have just come from the United Nations Kosovo Trust-building Forum, which I opened alongside Assistant Secretary-General Bintou Keita. We were joined by representatives of the UN Kosovo Team, the European Union, EULEX, and the OSCE from May 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> held in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Over 100 community leaders from throughout Kosovo came together to discuss ways to address common challenges caused by mistrust and stale political approaches, some twenty years after the height of conflict.

The starting point of the Forum was simple: not to reinvent or reinterpret past events, but to illuminate, guide and pursue a more positive path for the future. Motivated and energetic individuals from across Kosovo society debated the prospects for building trust through a wide range of positive action and cooperation. The main thematic areas were: media accountability, access to impartial justice, economic growth, access to public services, religious coexistence, and educational reform. Multiple focus groups worked to strengthen understanding across community divides. The resulting outcomes identified by participants provided a roadmap for objectives to be implemented

in Kosovo. Assistant Secretary-General Keita stressed that the Forum was a proactive attempt to further the sustaining peace agenda, engage in prevention at the local-level, as well as link political and developmental frameworks. I urged all leaders to organise the future, rather than mourn the past, and to move forward with more compassion, understanding, and clarity in advancing trust in the areas of work they identified during the Forum.

Madam President,

Important for Kosovo's European perspective, the Assembly of Kosovo ratified the 2015 territorial delineation agreement with Montenegro. This issue has been singled out by the European Union as a necessary step for Kosovo's integration with the Union, including visa liberalisation, for quite some time. While the international community appreciated this achievement, it has been underlined that the strengthening of the rule of law and human rights, as well as visible progress in the fight against corruption and organised crime, remained major issues in meeting the aspirations of the people of Kosovo for their European perspective. It is also important to acknowledge the approval of a new draft of the Kosovo criminal code, which introduces stricter penalties for offences related to corruption and misuse of official duty. This positive initiative complements ongoing efforts to depoliticise and enhance performance of the judiciary. We also share the analysis as recently presented in the European Commission's annual progress report about the effective application of human rights and the rule of law in Kosovo. It is in this context that Kosovo's rule of law institutions continue to be a major focus of both internal and external attention, as the EULEX mission is preparing a significant reconfiguration which will transfer direct responsibility to the Kosovo court system for cases hitherto handled with EULEX in the lead.

Concerning the protection of cultural heritage, I am pleased to note that the Implementation and Monitoring Council (IMC), tasked with overseeing the treatment of the Special Protected Zones surrounding religious sites, restarted its work. It is a timely development, as there have recently been attempts to undermine the judgments of Kosovo courts, as well as of the IMC, regarding construction near the Visoki Decani Monastery in Western Kosovo. The international community will continue to closely watch the government's actions in this case.

Madam President,

UNMIK continues to prioritise its own work in the areas of trust-building, human rights, and limited but essential aspects of support to rule of law and justice institutions. Crucial to the Mission's efforts are the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security as well as the Youth, Peace and Security agendas.

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, the Mission co-hosted with UN Women the 2018 United Nations Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security in Kosovo. Focused on women's political participation, the event convened more than 150 women political leaders from the central and local level, parliamentarians and government officials, representatives of the international community, civil society, academia, women's organisations and youth activists. The Global Open Day recognised the need for women's full and effective participation in leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. It also underlined the fact that women's political participation is indispensable to gender justice in order to end inequality, subordination, hierarchical status

and asymmetries of political power. The event was central to the Mission's recently-adopted Gender Framework Strategy and one part of a number of other important initiatives all over Kosovo commemorating International Women's Day.

The Youth, Peace, and Security agenda is also of paramount importance to UNMIK. Later this week, the Mission, working closely in collaboration with UNICEF and UNDP, will host the 2<sup>nd</sup> United Nations Youth Assembly in Kosovo. The event will gather 180 young leaders from diverse backgrounds alongside officials, civic organisations, and business leaders.

Madam President,

In the multi-faceted areas of the Mission's recalibrated work, UNMIK works fully in line with the core principles of Secretary-General Guterres' reform agenda and the guidance of this Council. Our efforts are aimed at sustaining peace; ensuring we remain at the forefront of monitoring and analysing the situation; and reinforcing strategic coordination with members of all UN entities as well as international partners in complementing the efforts of Kosovo's institutions. I thank the members of the Council for their continued support for our efforts and for their support to the EU-led dialogue aimed at the normalisation of relations and increased cooperation between Pristina and Belgrade.