

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

**New York**

**16 May 2017**

Mr President, Excellencies,

You have before you the Report of the Secretary-General covering the period between January and April 2017. Much has transpired since the end of this reporting period on 15 April, and I will share the main facts and some observations about the more recent developments. The last quarter witnessed fluctuating tensions and fragility, though the situation remains generally stable. Escalation has been avoided, in several instances, due to external diplomatic interventions, but the necessary level of trust between Pristina and Belgrade has been further eroded by a number of irresponsible and inflammatory statements. Both sides repeatedly accused one another of provocation, whereas the process of normalisation of relations requires cooperation.

Mr President,

The decision to call an early parliamentary election in Kosovo in June, following the collapse of the governing alliance – an alliance painstakingly forged in 2014 – was a significant development. The outcome of the election may draw a different future for Kosovo; the next government, regardless of its composition, will nonetheless continue to face numerous pressing challenges. Elections do provide

opportunities for the renewal of political will and direction, as well as for greater diversity in leadership and representation, for example greater engagement with youth.

I must also express my shock, shared by many in Kosovo, about the attack this past weekend against Arbana Xharra, a prominent media figure who recently entered electoral politics. Regardless the motives of the perpetrators, I cannot stress enough the importance of a swift and full investigation; this terrible incident having taken place at the outset of the political campaign.

Mr President,

It is my responsibility before this council to inform you about progress made and the challenges that remain, identifying dangers and dissecting the complexities of the current situation. It's important to note that the Mitrovica wall dispute was resolved peacefully through negotiations, and the initial determination to form a Kosovo army by legislative amendments has calmed. Such outcomes helped to diffuse tensions and maintain peace. However, the relations between Pristina and Belgrade are still not at ease. The frequent electoral cycles are part of a continuum of distraction that is not helping to advance the European Union-led Dialogue, or the implementation of its central agreements such as the Association / Community of Serb-majority municipalities. The dialogue has practically stood in abeyance for some months now. Its resumption is of the highest importance.

Mr President,

Alongside limited progress in the Dialogue process, public communications, during this reporting period, unfortunately descended back to intolerant and ethno-nationalist slogans. This tendency is one which should be followed closely, and is a matter of deep concern. Rather than elaborating this trend, allow me to review what we have heard from different leaders during this period. For example in relation to Serbia's request for the extradition from France of Ramush Haradinaj, leader of the AAK political party:

- Prior to the decision of the French authorities, on 9 March, the Kosovo Assembly adopted a resolution calling for suspension of the EU-facilitated dialogue with Belgrade, until Mr Haradinaj had been released. It is hoped that this resolution will now be rescinded.
- In a television interview in early April, prominent Assembly Member Daut Haradinaj, the brother of Ramush Haradinaj, warned of an “ethnically clean Kosovo” if judicial authorities in France were to rule in favour of Serbia's extradition request for his brother.
- Upon his return to Kosovo on 27 April, Ramush Haradinaj himself referred to Serbia's extradition request as “a call to war”, referred to the “enemy, Serbia” and threatened “we will do to them far worse than we did back then,” referring to the height of the war in 1999.
- Outgoing Serbian President Nikolic compared Haradinaj to a “rabid dog that has tasted human flesh”.

Such statements directly and negatively affect the atmosphere among the communities in Kosovo. Are these responsible statements? Such incitements to

hatred fall outside the realm of civil political discourse. They throw us into a situation where, as it is said, reason would be consumed in the flames of irresponsible and unnecessary behaviour.

Mr President,

Another issue that has received a great deal of attention is the question of regional or sub-regional unions, should European Union enlargement stall. Once more, I will report to the Council on what we have heard from different leaders during this period:

- In a mid-April interview the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, stated “everyone would like to unite in the big union. But if there’s no hope, no perspective, no space, then, of course, smaller unions may happen”. Other politicians seized the moment to shape this into a nationalist context.
- President Hashim Thaci remarked “if the EU continues with the delay and the unclear approach” then “all Albanians in the region will live in one unified state in order to proceed with integration into the European family”.
- The President of Serbia’s National Council of Albanians went further, saying “now is a key moment for Albania and Kosovo to show Serbia that this is a part of Albania that must not be touched”, referring to mixed ethnicity municipalities in southern Serbia.
- In reaction, Serbian Cabinet Minister Aleksandar Vulin stated that Greater Albania “can only be accomplished by a great Balkan war”. He further stated that “Albanians must be aware that they will have to fight their own wars and that they will pay for the wars Haradinaj is trying to cause with the heads of their own children”.

Whatever the real intent behind such remarks, some issues have moved from a more academic debate to the political level. Such suggestions can also fuel fears and tensions and could lead to something much worse. One must ask, what place does such rhetoric have in 2017? What should any person, be they Albanian or Serb, make of such statements? Such language and such thinking produces real effects on the ground.

There has been a notable cluster of security incidents centered upon the city of Mitrovica, including physical assaults, in some of which, weapons have been used. Under the European Union's important agreements, a long anticipated and positive development is the expected opening of the city's main bridge to vehicular traffic. Yet in the current climate, expectations are tinged with anxiety and fear, rather than optimism.

Mr President,

Constructive engagement continues to be possible, and we witness it on the ground every day. I have continued meeting municipal and community leaders throughout all parts of Kosovo. In this past quarter I had the opportunity to meet and talk with Municipal Mayors in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Pristina, North and South Mitrovica. I witnessed real commitment to promote cooperation between the communities, to resolve real issues in the daily life and needs of people. I have been exposed not to political rhetoric, but rather to serious work aimed at building a tolerant and inclusive society.

Particularly encouraging is the establishment, by the Associations of Families of Missing Persons, of a shared Resource Center. This center, supported by UNMIK, brings the families of missing persons together to encourage dialogue and common efforts. The missing persons issue is an open wound that inhibits societal reconciliation, but I have been struck by the spirit of unity at the Centre, calling for better performance by politicians and public institutions, in both Belgrade and in Pristina, to bring answers to those who have already suffered too long without such answers.

On 15 March, UNMIK hosted a Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security, which convened more than one hundred dignitaries, journalists, and political and civil society leaders to stoke a debate about women's role in societal reconciliation. The event's keynote address was delivered by former Kosovo President, Ms Atifete Jahjaga. We were highly impressed by the diversity of participation and the constructive manner in which participants were willing and able to discuss difficult issues. We will continue to support women who take courageous stands to shape a better future for Kosovo.

Furthermore, UNMIK has worked to implement this Council's Resolution 2250, focusing on youth. On 11 May, UNMIK hosted the second in a series entitled "*Stories from the other side*", which brings together young people from Kosovo's diverse communities. Identifying their shared perspective, they defined new ideas for tackling current social problems in Kosovo.

I wish to make special mention of the efforts of the EU Special Representative in Kosovo to reinvigorate the Implementation and Monitoring Council (IMC) for cultural heritage protection, which reconvened during this reporting period after a long hiatus. This mechanism is crucial for implementation of the Law on the Special Protective Zones, and as a platform for discussion of the full range of issues facing cultural heritage protection. Included among these is continuing obstruction by Decan/Decani authorities of the Kosovo Constitutional Court's ruling on property belonging to the Visoki Decani Monastery. The central authorities have yet to cancel the procedure for privatisation of the formerly disputed land, despite the clear legal decision by Kosovo's highest court.

Mr President,

Improving the situation in Kosovo and the region requires leadership which transcends ethno-national divisions, rather than amplifying them. Overcoming such destructive challenges is the spirit of the European project to which all regional actors aspire. I hope the members of this Council can continue to use their considerable influence to encourage democratic institutions to serve the real needs of the people, and to encourage leaders in Belgrade and Pristina to proceed with far-sighted dialogue, in their own and their people's true common interest.

Our Mission continues to work to support these ends, within all our means, and in full partnership and cooperation with local and international partners. The Council's authority remains absolutely indispensable for ensuring accountability, and recognising those who understand the welfare of people to be the true indicators of their political success.

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

I take this opportunity, once again, to thank all members of the Council for your ongoing support of our mission.

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