

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

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Mr President, Excellencies,

I am pleased to update the Council on recent key developments in Kosovo since the Secretary-General's last report and offer some observations.

The situation in Kosovo over the past three months has been more stable than it was during preceding reporting periods. Nonetheless the threat of security and political tensions remained beneath the surface. Following a period of relative calm, after months of unruly stand-offs in the Kosovo Assembly, a single issue was pushed afore into new controversy: the ratification of the agreement on Kosovo's territorial delineation with the Republic of Montenegro. Political arguments and accusations followed, often straying far from underlying facts. This irritated public sentiment, obstructed the functioning of the Assembly, and delayed work on more pressing issues. Although the agreement had been obtained with informed international support, consideration of its ratification by the Assembly was postponed.

No doubt, consensus-building efforts ought to have been held much earlier, well before the issue became a lightning rod for rancour and partisan debate.

Regardless, new efforts have been undertaken by political leaders in order to ensure any additional questions are answered.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties continue working from the wings to try to generate, exploit, and if possible prolong, such moments of ‘crisis’. Whatever success they may ultimately achieve in strengthening an alternate pole of influence, the opposition appear to be more aware that the use of violence is counterproductive to that objective. In addition, acts of political violence, including three incidents during the month of August using explosives, which targeted the Assembly, the home of a Kosovo official and the headquarters of a public broadcaster, are absolutely unacceptable. They are a problem which should continue to be managed responsibly by the authorities.

From my recent talks with top leaders in Kosovo, I have the impression that these leaders understand the need to place realism and practicality higher on their political agenda. Many have their eyes upon emerging wider trends, and the possibility these trends offer to seize levers of opportunity, and remove old obstacles, in order to achieve faster progress.

Mr President,

I have gained the same impression about local leadership during my visits to municipalities and communities throughout Kosovo. In Gjakovë/Đakovica, the Mayor indicated that ‘*authority comes with responsibility, not just privilege*’. In North Mitrovica, the main concerns were access to employment, reliable public services, and confidence in governing institutions. In Obiliq/Obilić the impact of nearby outdated energy facilities, over which the municipality has had little or no say, endangers public health and safety, and reduces social cohesion and local economic growth. In Vushtrri/Vučitrn, I learned that the different communities are able to work together toward a common future, and that inclusive governance is one of the key elements needed for this work. I heard

the desire for improved relations and more confidence between the ethnic communities.

Behind all of this, it is apparent that economic, educational and healthcare issues, as well as the rule of law and combatting corruption, are the dominant concerns of people at the local level, less than interethnic politics. Recently, a young man in the Prizren region approached me to say that ‘corruption is the biggest problem for my generation and for all people in Kosovo’, a message I have heard on many occasions.

Throughout all of former Yugoslavia, the immediate post-conflict generation has now reached voting age, and many are now graduating from tertiary education. Many young adults have known little of ‘public life’ besides divisive post-conflict rhetoric. If stability and prosperity are to be achieved, the post-conflict generation is in need of clearer directions, and better opportunities, as inhabitants of modern Europe, and as world citizens. A lack of promising trades and professions, public corruption, and extremes of economic inequality all fracture the communities far more than do the ethnic or religious nationalisms. Thus, an impetus for reconciliation emerges from below, but in my view it needs to be strengthened from above as well, by leaders. From some leaders, I already hear this clearly. But I have also heard it from other segments and sections of society, where individuals recognise the centrality of better putting the past behind, if there is to be meaningful movement forward.

Coming back from Belgrade just yesterday, I was also struck during my conversations with top leaders by the emphasis given to regional cooperation, and better understanding of the positions of other sides, when working to overcome the obstacles to trust and progress. As in Pristina, they also stressed specifically the need for the EU-led Dialogue to be successful. Prime Minister

Vučić, in particular, stressed to me that too much time was being lost, and that what is needed is more serious, and much more sustained commitment and work on the Dialogue – not only from leaders and negotiators, but from the European Union and from all of us in the international community as well.

Mr President,

The EU-led High Level Dialogue remains a cornerstone in the road toward reconciliation. It is the EU perspective in the region that continues to be a main driver of reform, particularly in the vital areas of governance, rule of law, and human rights. During this reporting period, progress continued to be made in some areas, including the start of the refurbishment of the Mitrovica Main Bridge, as well as the narrowing of differences on the telecommunications issue. Regarding other agreements, in particular the Community/Association of Serb-majority Municipalities, more focussed work is clearly necessary.

It is natural that delays in implementation can lead to second-guessing of the process itself, by observers and participants alike. Leadership from both sides is at least as important as pragmatism and commitment – not only to reinvigorate, but possibly also to deepen this process, going forward.

Mr President,

Fewer among the non-majority community members displaced by the conflict have returned to their homes, and of those who have returned, many have not stayed. Around 16,000 persons remain displaced within Kosovo, with many more outside. With the elapse of time, many have by now built new lives in their places of displacement. Yet the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons is a fundamental right, and this issue should, I believe, be

brought back into focus by all, including by the international community. To achieve returns, constructive engagement is needed with returnees and receiving communities, which must be matched by political commitment, but even more importantly, by the commitment of resources. According to UNHCR, some 9,400 displaced persons are registered to return now. For this to take place, clear, realistic commitments must be demonstrated in allocating the requisite resources and ensuring the proper conditions.

Kosovo possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage: including religious, linguistic, artistic and social diversity. The Kosovo system has comprehensive legislation protecting the freedoms of language use, association and worship. It is the full implementation and enforcement of these strong legislative frameworks which remains an essential objective.

During the past three months there have been no large-scale inter-ethnic disturbances, nor any significant attacks against cultural sites. However, vulnerable groups, in particular among non-majority communities, are subject to higher rates of intimidation. Statistics in this area must always be treated with enormous caution, but those available in UNMIK suggest there are on average around twenty-five ‘potentially ethnically motivated’ crimes recorded in Kosovo every month. All communities are affected, and the primary motives behind crimes frequently are found not to have been political. But it bears emphasis that the victims of intimidation always have a different perspective from those who have not experienced it. More sensitivity to this essential truth is needed by authorities from all sides, as well as from ourselves.

Concerning reconciliation, I wish to commend the courageous initiatives taken by President Thaçi. On 21 July, he visited and paid respects at the memorial commemorating fourteen Kosovo Serb civilians from Staro Gradsko who were

murdered in that village shortly after the end of hostilities. A few days later he visited another memorial to an unsolved crime against Kosovo Serbs, in the village of Gorazhdevac where teenagers swimming in a river were murdered in 2003.

These visits remind us also of the fact that all leaders share a solemn responsibility to do more to help resolve the cases of persons missing from the time of the conflict. Seventeen years after the end of the conflict, the fate of over 1,600 persons remains undetermined. All communities are affected by the loss. The issue of the missing should not be allowed to slip from the political agenda. The missing will only be found and their fates determined if there is fundamental and sustained commitment by all, including our Mission.

Mr President,

The phenomenon of violent extremism is a swiftly evolving global challenge. The presence of radical Islamist elements and organisers in Kosovo is known. The local authorities have taken numerous strong measures to mitigate the threat, but the presence of elements who have participated in recent foreign wars gives us all reasons to be vigilant and aware. Kosovo authorities have implemented a strong law enforcement approach concerning those who advocate violence and those who facilitate volunteer fighters. As they have acknowledged, this can only work when it goes hand in hand with a developmental approach which effectively targets the specific socio-economic drivers of extremism in Kosovo. There is also an important role to be played by the international community through well-coordinated assistance, including from the United Nations.

Mr President,

In recent days, we have been able to significantly strengthen constructive engagement with Kosovo leaders, which was reflected, among other things, in substantive meetings with President Thaçi, Prime Minister Mustafa, and Foreign Minister Hoxhaj. My constructive engagement with Belgrade leaders, including my discussions this week with President Nikolić, Prime Minister Vučić, and First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Dačić, remain essential for our balanced and objective role, within the framework of regional interaction, and toward the full realisation of our mandate.

In closing, I would like to highlight that during the past months, we have thoroughly reviewed the activities of the Mission, and developed a focused vision not only for recalibrating and optimising our work, but creating an atmosphere with all stakeholders that allows the Mission to engage more efficiently and effectively. This includes on both existing and emerging issues, such as the global problem of violent extremism and developing workable frameworks for reconciliation. In short, we will be implementing the objectives you have entrusted to us in a more up-to-date manner.

Thank you for your continuing support to UNMIK.

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