

**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,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr President, and Italy for the Presidency of this month of the Council, and I am happy to join this meeting today.

The latest reporting period is well covered in the Secretary-General's report we are reviewing today. I will additionally brief you on recent significant developments which have taken place since the end of the reporting period.

On 19 October, municipal elections were conducted throughout Kosovo, the second Kosovo-wide local elections since the 19 April 2013 agreement of principles between Belgrade and Pristina. It was the second time, therefore, that the four K-Serb majority municipalities in northern Kosovo participated in such elections. These elections saw strong turnout, particularly in the Serb majority areas throughout Kosovo. They provided the population of Kosovo the opportunity to select their most immediate leaders, and thus express their views about political priorities, as well as about the performance and delivery of the major competing parties. Over 7,000 candidates competed across Kosovo. A significant increase in Serb participation occurred in Serb-majority municipalities; average turnout was 43.4% in these municipalities, which can be compared with around 38% in 2013. In the four northern municipalities, the difference was even more pronounced: 44%

compared with 24% turnout in 2013. The European Union deployed around 100 observers across Kosovo on election day, while the OSCE facilitated voting in the northern municipalities. Both organisations praised the generally peaceful and orderly conduct of the elections, however, EU Observers also stressed that, in the Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities, the campaign was affected by restricted competition and intimidation.

As I reported in August, the multiple election processes this year in Kosovo produced a period in which few decisions could be undertaken with necessary authority in Pristina. With runoffs for mayoral elections scheduled for 19 November, and the electoral processes now near to completion, I am hopeful this will soon change. Some signs are cautiously promising already. The new Assembly of Kosovo, on 31 October, passed a second reading of the Kosovo budget, despite the narrow majority held by the government. The Serb caucus and the cabinet of the Prime Minister collaborated to achieve this result, while we see signs of movement on other particularly important social and economic issues which have repeatedly been delayed during the lengthy-elections period.

This leaves the question of what lies ahead. During the past three months, I have had the opportunity to share views on the situation with a variety of interlocutors, in Pristina, in Belgrade and more widely. I would like to underline the fact that all sides generally share the view that the state of affairs between Belgrade and Pristina has the potential to evolve beyond the unfortunate long-standing impasse.

Mr President,

On 24 October, 40 new judges and 13 new state prosecutors from the Serb community were sworn into office in Kosovo, a significant step in the implementation of the first EU-facilitated agreement. These judicial officials will work as part of a unitary Kosovo justice system, and staffing and logistical arrangements are also underway, with support from all the international presences in Kosovo, including from UNMIK. The parties are to be commended for moving this forward. The judicial area had lagged notably behind other implementation achievements, such as police integration and implementation of technical steps in the telecommunications and utilities spheres.

However, it is equally important to note that overall, the implementation of agreements achieved in 2013, and even earlier, continue, at best, to be sporadic and variable. Within the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue, technical implementation needs more meaningful commitment from both sides. The most obvious gap still remains the lack of progress towards the implementation of the agreed Community/Association of Serb-majority municipalities.

Mr President,

Considerable headway has already been made, and the EU-facilitated dialogue in Brussels remains crucial as a core element in a wider process. Alongside this endeavour, the European Union's Berlin Process, addressing the future enlargement potential of the European Union, has also progressed. Having begun at a 2014 Conference of Western Balkan States, it has been followed by meetings in 2015 in Vienna, 2016 in Paris, and 2017 in Trieste. Again, its strength lies in the inevitable conclusion that economic growth, peace and prosperity depend upon the quality of relations amongst neighbours, on the creation of a beneficial space of

connectivity, and on the prospects for multi-faceted interaction. My own discussions with leaders in Belgrade, Pristina, and Tirana have convinced me that each of these important centres understand this principle in this light.

In relation to the Belgrade-Pristina political dialogue, which has suffered from a long hiatus, what I can say today is that both sides are well aware of its importance and its potential during the forthcoming year. To that effect, informal consultations with European Union facilitators have taken place over several months, most importantly with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

Signs of political will and commitment to move forward seem increasingly evident. Populations are understandably frustrated by the lack of opportunities brought on by unresolved political mistrust and tensions. With the end of the election cycle, the time for action now moves ahead of the time for excuses. In many practical areas, political bickering and the failure to fully implement technical agreements place unacceptable burdens on the population. As one example, excessive administrative obstacles continue to discourage travel and commerce, despite agreements which purported to alleviate such impediments.

Allow me to offer another example, which arose during just the past few days. In accordance with its mandate, UNMIK has continued to do everything within its authorised powers to support implementation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement, which UNMIK signed on behalf of Kosovo in 2006. In practice, Pristina representatives working on CEFTA issues attend all CEFTA meetings. UNMIK's basic participation has always been in accordance with legal statutes. Despite these facts, some actors recently sought to re-politicise – through

public rhetoric – these otherwise highly practical, functional and beneficial arrangements. Permit me, in this forum, to be very clear: UNMIK participation continues strictly to the extent required by CEFTA members to ensure its functionality, which in turn supports economic opportunity throughout the region. UNMIK will equally support any agreement reached by CEFTA Members which would allow them to work effectively together. In our view such arrangements are best achieved through discussions amongst those concerned, not through the media.

Mr President,

I have previously taken note here and commended President Vučić's initiative for internal dialogue on Serbia's stance toward the Kosovo issue. I have also taken note that Prime Minister Edi Rama in Tirana has stated that such internal examinations will not be lost in Tirana or Pristina either. These forward-thinking positions do a real service to the people, as they seek to address the facts head on. Leaders in the European Union, regardless of the multiplicity of greater global challenges they face, have also made a focused engagement in the region a priority. All parties need now to play their part as well. This is the thesis upon which the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue rests. It is important that the potential for embarking on a sustainable peace process not be hindered by inflexibility or simple inaction.

Mr President,

While dialogue and other diplomatic initiatives can provide a new basis for peace-making, serious work to address pressing and immediate issues also need energetic

attention in Pristina. The much needed provision of economic and employment opportunities, the need to counter public corruption and ensure public accountability at all levels, and perhaps above all, fighting against organised criminality are crucial objectives.

Mr President,

Our mission in Kosovo is working particularly at grass-roots levels to support the impulse of people to pursue the benefits of cooperation, and of reconciliation. We apply the funds available to us to support ground-level initiatives which shape the future and perspective of the post-conflict generation in Kosovo. Talent knows no boundaries of gender, ethnicity or political affiliation.

We find energy within this new government, which is already taking new steps to work in a multi-ethnic partnership. We find it in region-wide initiatives to remove the scourge of political interference in the delivery of justice and the rule of law. We find it in the bold initiatives being undertaken by all, to examine fundamentally the issues that will allow the Western Balkans to continue to advance their European aspirations.

Our attention has also been on issues that require more emphasis, essential for reconciliation and rebuilding of trust. These include initiatives to engage women in the political process; to help to bring attention to the untold histories of those targeted during the time of the conflict; to promote the role of youth in peace and security; and to do more to resolve the cases of many persons still missing from the war. We stand in open partnership with all governments to address these issues. We, likewise, recognise the immense challenges of ensuring the freedom of

cultural and religious identity, and the fight against extreme and close-minded views, which are a threat and plague not only in our area, but throughout the world at present.

Mr President,

UNMIK continues to play its role working towards a closer partnership with all international presences on the ground and with all actors engaged, particularly at a time when we are witnessing new dynamics emerging in the region. The final objective of the Mission remains clear, with your support: sustained peace, and the opportunities it brings for individuals to fulfil their aspirations and their potential.

Thank you, Mr President.

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