

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

**New York**

**27 February 2017**

Mr President, Excellencies,

Before I offer my remarks on the situation in Kosovo, I would like to express my profound sadness on the passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, of the Russian Federation. I express my sincere condolences to his wife, his family, and the Government of the Russian Federation, on having lost one of the country's greatest diplomats. We will miss him in this Council.

Mr President,

As noted in the report of the Secretary-General, the past months have been characterised by inconsistent progress, and moreover, by heightened tension between Belgrade and Pristina, including a reciprocal series of reactions and counter-reactions, accompanied at times by threatening and bellicose rhetoric. The events and political posturing reduces space for progress within the top-level political dialogue, a process that remains as fragile as it is essential and irreplaceable.

During my recent discussions in Pristina and Belgrade, each side naturally expressed differing perceptions of the reasons behind the reduced quality of communications and relations, and in general accused one another of having engaged in intentional provocations. Pristina leaders perceive various actions

and words from Belgrade as being calculated to undermine the objectives of the Pristina government, particularly as regards its outreach efforts toward the northern Serb-majority municipalities. Belgrade leaders perceive the actions and words from Pristina as attempts to side-step processes based in the EU-facilitated dialogue and create new realities on the ground.

Irrespective of the divergent perceptions and interpretations, the facts were that a succession of events, detailed in the Secretary-General's report, combined to undermine trust, to inhibit the space for productive dialogue, and to push the situation uncomfortably close to renewed instability and confrontation. I should note that, since the issuance of the report, several other significant developments have taken place, including some more constructive ones.

At the beginning of this month, partially as a response to an escalating situation, Belgrade and Pristina leaders finally met at the highest political level in Brussels under the auspices of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This meeting was an essential step to chart a path out of a deteriorating situation and to publicly reconfirm their commitment to work together.

A few days later, after close consultations led by the EU Special Representative and involving various other diplomatic partners, the Mayor of North Mitrovica and the Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning of Kosovo signed an agreement to remove the wall, which previously had been constructed as part of the bridge redevelopment plan near to the northern end of the Mitrovica bridge. It was removed without incident on 5 February, and construction has subsequently begun on a newly agreed park space plan which addresses the concerns of all stakeholders.

Most recently, Pristina has renewed calls for transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into Kosovo Armed Forces, including the passage of a Kosovo Assembly resolution. This initiative remains opposed by the Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade, with reference to resolution 1244 emphasizing the exclusive role and authorities of the international security presence, KFOR.

Mr President,

In the short term, the effects of the recent stresses in Kosovo still reverberate. Trust and confidence among Kosovo Serbs and Albanians has been affected; it will take time to rebuild. Nonetheless, with the restarting of the top-level dialogue, there are signs that work is again happening towards this goal: discussing details of implementing the future Community/Association of Serb-majority municipalities will certainly help the Kosovo Serbs to re-engage with the range of government activities from which they have unfortunately removed themselves over the past three months.

As seen in the past, one-sided approaches or steps aimed at resolving issues that affect both sides, and indeed overall progress in the normalisation process, are more likely to lead to confrontation than to positive results in the direction desired by those who contemplate such steps.

There is no alternative to dialogue. The international prescriptions set forth to Pristina and Belgrade are categorical imperatives: non-confrontation, resolving issues through dialogue, and placing the objective improvement of the lives of people ahead of more limited and parochial calculations. I hope this Council will help to hold leaders to their words, that they will maintain a sincere and

consistent commitment to dialogue, to the full implementation of all the agreements already reached, and to avoid making statements or undertaking activities that undermine its potential and put at risk all the benefits it is designed to bring to the population: security, prosperity, and peace.

Mr President,

Kosovo's institutions continue to face daunting challenges to deliver as their leaders might wish. Political infighting persists. Disputes between the government and opposition remain acrimonious. Disputes between governing parties are also visible, as is dissent within governing parties. Major stakeholders feel pressure to position themselves for the electoral cycles, too often at the expense of time and energy that can be devoted to governance. Belgrade is also engaged in a political campaign surrounding the presidential elections in April. It is paramount to ensure electoral politics do not disrupt vital processes and progress; the kind of progress that is only built up with sustained time and effort, beyond the fluctuations of political seasons. Normalisation of relations, reconciliation, and justice all belong to that broader horizon.

Success in the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is interlinked with the long-term and sustainable, societal reconciliation among Kosovo's communities. Courageous leadership and positive actions are important to promote changes in attitudes. We recognise and appreciate a number of significant steps taken by some leaders, and encourage more sustained efforts to move beyond the past, to focus on the future.

Along with all my international colleagues in Kosovo, I took careful note of the recently announced initiative to explore the establishment of a Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, as one additional mechanism to open internal dialogue between the communities in Kosovo. Any such initiative should be lauded and given as much support as needed to encourage success. It is also important to recall that such initiatives are parts of a greater whole: the EU-facilitated dialogue itself is also one part, as is the serious work underway to provide for the many victims of the conflict in Kosovo who still await justice. Among the most essential international principles and practices for conducting truth and reconciliation processes in the post-conflict setting are: impartiality, independence, transparency, complementarity with other efforts, full consultation and participation by all stakeholders involved, and, ultimately, commitment to the due diligence and care required for such a sensitive process.

Mr President,

Concentrated work needs to continue in order to improve the social and economic situation in Kosovo. Addressing unemployment, making progress in the rule of law, and fighting corruption remain central for all people in Kosovo. People who find little hope or prospects within the society experience frustration and isolation. Many will gravitate to alternative paths, including those leading to religious radicalisation and violent extremism. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, the threat of violent extremism and terrorism remains real in Kosovo and throughout the region. Professional work by Kosovo's security bodies continue, while better integration into regional and international approaches can greatly leverage these efforts. Through the current five-year plan coordinated by the Office of the Prime Minister, the authorities of Kosovo are also focussing on a holistic approach to the issue, including in educational and developmental spheres. This important work can also benefit from strong support and coordination with global efforts.

Mr President,

Coordinated responses and engagement during the recent period of increased tensions, notably involving the EU, KFOR, UNMIK, and OSCE, among others, once again confirmed the importance of the ongoing international engagement in the maintenance of peace and stability in Kosovo and its region. Stability in Kosovo, normalisation of relations between Pristina and Belgrade, are part of the wider effort to improve stability in the Western Balkans.

Last week in this Council, the Secretary-General highlighted the danger of instability in the Western Balkans. Any tension or potential crisis between Belgrade and Pristina cannot be seen in isolation from the challenges that the region already faces. Good neighbourly relations, dedication to a common future within a unified European space, a commitment to human rights and the rule of law, and resolving disputes only through the peaceful means of dialogue and compromise are as essential for Kosovo as they are for the entire region.

As I have been reporting to you over the past months, UNMIK has brought a newly-calibrated focus to its work, providing applicable support where it is most suited, and working to ensure that the parties, the EU-centred political processes, and all our international organisational partners benefit from well-coordinated and consonant partnership on the ground. In so doing, we are grateful for the close support we receive from all members of this Council.

I thank the Council most sincerely for that ongoing support.

END