

**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 all new member states who have joined the Security Council in 2018. In particular, I would like to congratulate you, Mr President, and Kuwait for holding the Presidency of the Council this month.

Today I will update you on new developments, some of which are well-documented in the Secretary-General's report before you, focusing on central facts that have dominated the reporting period and the days that have followed.

Mr President,

Yesterday, the new enlargement strategy of the European Union for the Western Balkans was launched, the most ambitious and far-reaching framework for engagement since the Thessaloniki summit of 2003. The new strategy paves the way for enlargement linked with political and socio-economic reform, as well as reconciliation and lasting resolution of disputes. There was a mixed reaction in Kosovo, but most Pristina leaders emphasised the importance of this new strategy for the realisation of Kosovo's EU perspective. It is clear within this new framework, Mr President, that dialogue and the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is a prerequisite for Kosovo's EU aspirations.

Mr President,

While there have been a number of formal and informal high-level contacts of leaders from Pristina and Belgrade, it has been more than a year that, at the technical level, the dialogue has produced little substantive progress. A number of standing agreements are yet to be fully implemented; essential among them the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities. 2018 can present a new momentum for this dialogue, and as the EU High Representative herself highlighted yesterday, the dialogue could be positively concluded, given sufficient will from the leaders, and adequate encouragement from the international community.

Mr President,

The recent attempt to abrogate the law on the Specialist Chambers by a number of members of the ruling coalition in the Kosovo Assembly, drew attention and raised grave concerns from all stakeholders about Kosovo's commitment to justice and the impartial application of the rule of law. The establishment of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office, adopted by the Assembly in 2015, was a major achievement for Kosovo. Yet in contradiction to this advancement, on the evening of 22 December, some Kosovo MPs launched an effort to revoke a key law supporting the work of the Specialist Chambers. Nearly all regional and international partners of Kosovo made it clear that such a move, if successful, would be deeply damaging to Kosovo's aspirations and reputation. Some of the political leaders stepped back from this proposal, however, the motion to repeal the law for now remains on the agenda of the Assembly. The President of the Assembly of Kosovo assured me that leaders in Pristina would stand by their international commitments. I take the opportunity to reiterate: this court does not target any particular community or group, but only individual's criminal responsibility. This is something well-

known by many in Kosovo, who understand that repealing the Specialist Chambers is simply not an option. The only way forward is accepting justice.

Mr President,

The murder on 16 January of Oliver Ivanović, the prominent, Kosovo Serb, politician, in broad daylight sent shockwaves through Kosovo and across the region; raising concerns about the prospect of another wave of political instability. I condemned the murder hours after it took place, calling for calm as well as for swift and decisive work by investigating authorities. All representatives of the international community were united in this view. Moreover, I have urged all to work together to ensure the perpetrators of this brutal act are brought to justice.

It is important to note that the leaders in Belgrade and Pristina have reacted to this event in a prompt and responsible manner. As Kosovo Police lead the investigation, Pristina and Belgrade have come to an understanding to share information and support the process. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić visited Kosovo shortly after the incident, telling Kosovo Serb communities in the north and the south of Kosovo that peace was of paramount importance. I would also like to underline the constructive role of Pristina officials in facilitating this visit.

In my meetings with leaders in Pristina, they made it clear to me that they are doing whatever is necessary to find the perpetrators of this crime and the motives of the killing. Belgrade is cooperating with the investigation, but concerns remain, including about the efficiency of information exchange. Failure to identify the perpetrators would not only be a terrible miscarriage of justice, but would also undermine confidence on all sides.

Mr President,

In 2017 Kosovo went through parliamentary and municipal elections and the formation of a new government. The people of Kosovo have high expectations of their government and the Assembly; given their needs and the promises made to them. The harsh realities of everyday life in Kosovo: unemployment; challenges to good governance; economic and social development; as well as corruption and organised crime — all these require political actors to come together, transcend their differences, and achieve a unity of purpose for the good of the people. They will be assisted in this by ensuring a positive and productive relationship with the international community and all the institutional presences on the ground.

A welcome example, has been the unified efforts of political parties to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda. I laud the government's commitment to strive to end poverty, improve education, prioritise gender equality, protect the environment, promote a just and peaceful society, and ensure prosperity for all – commitments which are fundamental to overcoming the challenges facing Kosovo.

Mr President,

The international community continues to assist the Kosovo institutions in promoting justice, rule of law, and human rights. The government of Kosovo approved four draft laws regarding the functioning of the judicial system aiming at increasing its efficiency and transparency. I would like to mention that judicial integration is moving forward, with officials in the Mitrovica Basic Court and Basic Prosecution office working as part of a unitary Kosovo justice system. Our mission

as well as other international presences are working hand in hand to enable the full functioning of this integrated system; following up on issues such as full compliance with language rights.

At the same time we take note of the decision of the government of Kosovo aimed at recognition and verification of the status of victims of conflict-related sexual violence, including the allocation for monthly pensions for survivors. Additionally, I acknowledge the appointment by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, of the Deputy Chair of the Kosovo government's Commission on Missing Persons.

Despite these important steps, many challenges remain about furthering the rule of law and strengthening human rights in Kosovo. Efforts in these areas must be guided by best international practices. Among a number of setbacks in the rule of law, the use of presidential pardons for three individuals convicted of murder in the so-called 'Hajra Family Case' was particularly concerning. Human rights protections should not be diminished by political considerations or ethnic dimensions; such attempts would cast a dark shadow over the promises of a rule-based society.

Mr President,

UNMIK and its partners have assisted in strengthening the role of women and youth and helping consolidate their essential contribution to peace, security, and the building of trust across communities. The annual international campaign "16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence" took place throughout Kosovo during this reporting period. The campaign highlighted actions involving international, governmental and civil society, contributing to public awareness of the drivers and

consequences of violence against women and girls. Women still face an uphill challenge in electoral politics. Of 204 mayoral candidates across all of Kosovo's municipalities only eight were women. A concerted effort is required to achieve more balanced representation, and provide women with a more level-playing field.

Similarly, the youth, peace, and security agenda remains important in Kosovo. The youth of Kosovo, despite their understandable frustrations with the status quo, provide hope for a better present and a better future. UNMIK continues to engage young people from across Kosovo through initiatives like the United Nations Youth Assembly in Kosovo. I am inspired by the strength of character of the young leaders I have met; leaders who have the courage to join hands across societal divides and develop a common strategy and vision for a successful, multi-ethnic society.

Building trust between communities remains essential for the Mission. Sustainable peace cannot be achieved without the engagement of all institutions and the assistance of the international community to build bridges for long-term trust. Our mission has undertaken a number of initiatives focused on supporting grassroots trust-building and using the know-how of the United Nations to help achieve this end. There are many Kosovo leaders at all levels across society, who are committed to this agenda, and who we are actively supporting.

Mr President,

This moment represents an opportunity for progress and for moving the political dialogue forward. I have completed a series of consultations just before this Council session with leaders and officials in Pristina, Belgrade, and Tirana. Despite the significant differences voiced, I am convinced these leaders also have a broader

understanding of the nature of the challenges that need to be overcome, and equally, not to continuously postpone action to another day. I would like to underline that despite all the disagreements, the potential for trust and more forward-looking decision-making should not be underestimated.

Thank you very much.

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