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PDSRSG address to Forum 2015 roundtable

PRISTINA – PDSRSG Larry Rossin this morning addressed the “Status vs. Status Quo” roundtable organised by Kosovan NGO Forum 2015 today in Pristina. The following is the text of his address:

“My thanks to Forum 2015, to Luan Shllaku, Muhamet Mustafa, for their invitation to this important roundtable, and I am also pleased to share this platform also with Prime Minister Kosumi and the distinguished Professor Kullashi.

I welcome this round-table discussion and initiative by civil society to enter into the process of preparing Kosovo’s approaches for the political process leading to determination of Kosovo’s future political status, as called for in UN Security council Resolution 1244.

I would like to make one thing clear at the outset of my remarks – this is your debate, not mine, not the SRSG’s, not UNMIK’s. The role of the SRSG under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 is, among other things, to facilitate the political process leading to future status determination for Kosovo. It is properly to encourage and assist the Kosovo people, institutions and actors to organize themselves and their processes to participate effectively in that political process.

It is not to enter into the process or substance of preparation of their position by the Kosovo actors. That is your business alone. Such substantive engagement by the SRSG or UNMIK would fall outside the SRSG’s and UNMIK’s mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

To facilitate the development of Kosovo’s own processes, that can develop Kosovo’s capacity to participate substantively and coherently in what is likely to be a dynamic diplomatic process spanning a considerable period of time, the SRSG has fostered the creation of a “Kosovo Forum” with the participation of the President of Kosovo and leaders of the four main parties participating in the Kosovo Assembly.

One key activity envisaged for the Forum, and for what we hope will emerge as a Working Group of the Forum on status preparations, is precisely that: preparation for Kosovo’s role in the status process.

Most recently, the “Forum” agreed on the establishment of a Secretariat, which has begun to meet and which we hope will begin to take on these activities. I have had the privilege of working with the Secretariat members, all of whom I know and respect, and they come into this with political backing and common goodwill. The Secretariat and Forum itself now need, quickly, to deepen their substantive activity, certainly in the area of future status process preparation.

While the outcome of Ambassador Eide's comprehensive review is not preordained, and he is completely independent, it is entirely plausible, looking at the constellation of relevant factors, to imagine the political process to determine Kosovo's future status beginning this autumn.

By that time, the Kosovo actors will have to have established processes and positions on all the major issues related to future status, in order to participate effectively and coherently in the process.

We, and we believe the Forum members, envisage active participation by experts, civil society and other non-governmental, non-political actors in formulating positions.

As the Prime Minister and others have noted, there has been much international assistance toward the building of civil society in Kosovo. Now, the role and benefit of civil society, to provide constructive support to Kosovo's development, must be realized.

Thus, the discussion being launched today is encouraging and to be encouraged.

I would hope and urge, however, that this work in due course be fed into the structures that we look to having evolve from the Forum and Working Group, so that Kosovo's actors may present a fleshed-out and coherent position on the range of issues likely to figure in the political discussions leading to resolution of Kosovo's status.

In that regard, I read the paper before the round table today with interest. As UNMIK Principal Deputy SRSG, I cannot and will not take a stance on the fundamental recommendation of the paper about the outcome of talks. Nor will I enter into my own assessment of the historical and practical arguments the paper lays out to make its case.

Certainly, the SRSG has on numerous occasions expressed UNMIK's view that resolution of Kosovo's status has become, increasingly, a key, perhaps the key, to moving forward in economic and political institution building, reform, revitalization and stabilization, job creation, and many other areas.

What I would like to recommend to round table participants here today and in future such events is that you not just rehearse the historic and practical arguments that make up the bulk of this paper. Rather, I suggest you focus on practical elements of the upcoming future status discussion some of which are touched on, but mainly tangentially, in this first paper.

The overarching arguments in the paper are, in fact, familiar to those from the international community likely to play leading roles in the political process to determine Kosovo's future status. What they will be looking for from all the parties to these discussions, once the initial stances are laid out, are concrete approaches to any number of issues that might be already identified as likely elements in such a process.

These may include, as the paper briefly refers to, minority protections – here, while the paper offers assurances that status determination will ease well-known and undeniable tensions between communities in Kosovo, it is fair to predict that the international community participants will look for concrete ideas for affirmative protective measures for minorities, more than just general assurances. The Kosovo side needs to develop

positions on what such guarantees they might find it agreeable to put forward, and which not, and why or why not.

Similarly, the paper usefully notes the issue of the status and protection of Orthodox religious sites as a matter that is likely to, and can, be an area of Pristina forthcomingness in the eventual political process to determine Kosovo's future status. That is good and can certainly be expected to figure in the status process, and concrete ideas from the Kosovo participants will be not only welcomed and needed, but solicited.

There are many other such issues – debt and asset distribution, return of art treasures and cadastral records, assurances for equal provision of services to all communities and addressing the phenomenon of parallel structures, documentation matters, regional relations, provisions for ensuring effective and equal security for all communities on even the most sensitive issues post-status, and likely others – that are certain to figure in the political process to resolve Kosovo's status.

On all of these too, the Kosovo actors will need to develop concrete and credible positions.

And Kosovo will also need a dynamic process to address issues as they arise and evolve in an intense diplomatic process that is likely to last for considerable time. This will not be a process in which all sides lay out opening positions and that is it.

Additionally, you will need constant dialogue and open interaction with all communities within Kosovo. The reality is that while support for independence may be vast in Kosovo, it is not a matter of full consensus among all the people of Kosovo. Building mutual confidence will, as you are aware, be a key international community consideration in the status process, just as it is now and has been.

In that regard, I would suggest that future meetings organized by this group invite also representatives of all other communities, and present ideas in all the communities' languages. Certainly it can be expected that international community actors in this process will solicit such inputs themselves and look for Kosovans to do so.

Therefore, if I may, let me conclude by applauding your initiative today. It is a good start, but comparing that long list of highly specific matters with the overarching nature of today's first thought paper, it can be seen that all actors – whether in the "Forum," in a Working Group, in the government, Assembly, Presidency and other official instances, or in civil society – and hopefully, all working together – have a lot of specific and hard work to do, and in a relatively short period.

Thus, I look forward to hearing the outcomes, the fruit of your discussions, but above all look forward to this being the first stage in your contributions, as non-governmental actors, to the important process which lies before the structures and people of Kosovo."