



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9312th meeting

Thursday, 27 April 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (S/2023/247)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2023/247)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/247, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ziadeh.

Ms. Ziadeh: I am honoured to update the Security Council on developments in Kosovo, which during the most recent reporting period included serious challenges as well as an important collective effort to bring Belgrade-Pristina relations nearer to stability and normalization. Efforts from both sides will be needed in order to realize the potential for a positive change in relations, particularly given the preceding cycles of tension, provocations and grievances that occurred during much of 2022 and unfortunately have continued, in some respects, even in the most recent days.

Regular breakdowns of effective, timely and preventive action are well documented in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/247). Without increased

commitment to the mechanism for renewed negotiations, failures of confidence could worsen within Kosovo, with direct consequences for regional stability. Therefore, a sustained focus of attention on the principles and declarations jointly affirmed on 27 February in Brussels, and further elaborated on 18 March in Ohrid, should be matched by courageous leadership action from the parties and from the stewards and supporters of the negotiations.

Specific commitments have been made by both sides to the new agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia, alongside which there are immediate steps that can be taken to demonstrate goodwill on the ground. Achieving actual progress demands that confidence be rebuilt among those who have grown suspicious of the intentions of each side. Leaders should take responsible steps to reduce the likelihood of further standoffs on issues that have eroded public confidence over recent months.

Those issues include matters that precipitated the withdrawal of Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo institutions en masse in November and those that continue to polarize public opinion during the local elections conducted last Sunday. Steps should be taken to demonstrate that police and judicial bodies are fully insulated from political agendas and political interference. Clear and continuous communication to the public will be needed concerning issues that affect their livelihoods and human rights — issues such as expropriations of property and the ability to count upon impartial institutions of justice. Reassurance is necessary in order to replace the feelings of mistrust and uncertainty felt by ordinary inhabitants, on both sides of the Ibar River. Accusatory rhetoric should be avoided, and fears should be replaced with concrete reasons for confidence and optimism.

The 23 April extraordinary elections were peaceful and calm. At the same time, questions of representation must be addressed as part of the broader political process that is now ongoing. Elected leaders, police forces and all civic services at the municipal level should genuinely reflect and fulfil the interests of their local constituents.

On 2 May, the expected endorsement by both parties of the joint declaration on missing persons, facilitated by the European Union (EU), has the potential to resume full cooperation between Pristina and Belgrade on missing persons within the existing working group, chaired by the International Committee of the Red Cross. That would provide families on both

sides the chance for answers regarding their loved ones. Likewise, the presentation by the management team of a draft statute for the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities should lead to its immediate, detailed and good-faith consideration. The charting of a full-implementation path is the minimum baseline owed to the public by leaders during their next high-level meeting. Indispensably, the joint monitoring committee will need to prove to be efficient in its operation and robust in its oversight of actions taken by both sides.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that this meeting is taking place against the backdrop of significant anniversaries, which offer an important perspective on recent developments. Among them are the twentieth anniversary of the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, at which the EU pronounced its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. As has also been widely noted, this month marks the tenth anniversary of the signing at Brussels of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. During the intervening years, as outlined in numerous reports to the Council, inconsistencies of commitment and action — local as well as international — have regularly limited progress in advancing the normalization of relations. In the latter half of 2022, actions and reactions took Pristina and Belgrade further away from the course previously agreed to in the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue and, worrisomely, even close to the edge of physical confrontation. Those are the trends that responsible leaders must now work to change.

Through my interactions with a wide array of interlocutors — including municipal, religious, civil society and business organizations — the most common sentiments I encounter are frustration and concern about an uncertain future. However, equally, I see the spirit and the will to work to create a better reality. That is something we cherish as we work alongside all people striving for positive and tangible changes.

Neighbours across the region, those already European Union members and those aspiring to join it, are watching as well. Commerce and investment simply will bypass those areas in which normalized relations are unattained, or where tensions threaten basic institutional stability. Leaders from the region have expressed their support for the process now being undertaken by both sides to advance along the path to normalization. Many have faced and overcome their own past challenges towards achieving stability,

reconciliation and progress. They have done so by addressing difficult issues with creativity and a sense of longer-term political responsibility.

In the region, opportunities for reducing barriers to economic development and cooperation are being pursued through the promotion of important initiatives that can, and should be, expedited, including by progress towards normalization. In support of that process, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) will continue to dedicate all efforts to help both sides and their constituencies reap the benefits of improved communication and understanding of common problems — and implementing solutions.

That brings me to another anniversary. This year also marks five years of work under the rubric of UNMIK's trust-building agenda. That programme of activity sustains support for those on the ground working sincerely to promote inter-community trust, resilience and confidence. It is an investment, over the longer term, in those who can positively reshape relations at all levels. Our focus is on the empowerment of communities to flourish in spaces where ethnically divisive prejudice and political rhetoric are being transcended. Trust-building can directly help light the path to political normalization. Political agreements need such soil in which to grow. Together, those approaches mark a genuine path towards a more sustainable, peaceful and ultimately prosperous future for all.

I will highlight only a few ways in which the Mission is empowering trust-building champions to overcome the divisions wrought by miscommunication and frequent political invective. They include supporting language rights and language learning, where an UNMIK-sponsored online platform to learn Albanian and Serbian reaches more than 70,000 users. We are assisting families of missing persons via the Missing Persons Resource Centre. We are promoting, and will continue to promote, the empowerment of youth and women leaders by providing substantial platforms for their engagement at all levels of decision-making. We are helping to ensure equal access to justice through improved courtroom infrastructure, free legal aid and legal interpretation services. Next month, we will inaugurate a community dialogue centre designed and led by local trust-building champions. We continue to strengthen cohesive, cross-cutting work with United Nations agencies and with all our international partners. Together, we are steadily growing the

constituency for political compromise — despite all the challenges — while demonstrating the positive effects that path offers in the real lives of people.

It should be the aspiration of all of us that the accumulation of international efforts will now chart a realistic path towards normalization. The obstacles to that process may take the form of posturing or insufficient political will to open the space for public acceptance. Implementation will surely face many pitfalls and require patience. None of those pitfalls, however, can match the gains to be achieved for the people through perseverance and delivery.

UNMIK will remain committed to supporting, at all levels, the progress made, which is among the most important parts of our mandate. We will do so in the expectation that the choices made by political leaders, the fulfilment of their obligations and their commitments will lead to greater opportunities for a generation deserving better. To play our role, the Mission continues to rely upon the support of the Council, as we work together with our partners within and beyond the full spectrum of the United Nations system. I thank the Council for that support and for promoting solutions that serve the interests of a new generation in Kosovo and the region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. Ziadeh for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

Mr. Dačić (Serbia) (*spoke in Serbian; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): As always, I am honoured to be here today. I am convinced that the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Ziadeh, have constructive intentions, and we appreciate her desire and commitment. However, the fact is that the report (S/2023/247) we are considering today is not, and will never be, sufficient for a comprehensive and essential understanding of all the implications of security and other challenges in Kosovo and Metohija on regional and global flows. Therefore, continuing to consider the report of the Secretary-General's in an open format is of key importance to better describe the complex and disturbing situation in the area of Kosovo and Metohija to the entire membership of the United Nations and to the general public.

I speak to the Council at a time when calls for respect for the Charter of the United Nations have never been heard louder in this organ. It is exactly those appeals that the Republic of Serbia has been making continuously for the past 24 years, but with one small and significant difference — we are led by a powerful minority to believe that the example of Kosovo and Metohija is so-called *sui generis*. Throughout history, it has been shown that such exceptions create precedents, and precedents greatly influence existing rules and interpretations of norms of international law. It is clear that there are double standards that lead us to different interpretations of the universal principles of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every State Member of the United Nations. Apparently, that does not apply to Serbia.

That is why it is my duty to call for consistent application of the valid — I repeat, valid — resolution 1244 (1999), which unfortunately has not been consistently or fully implemented to this day. At the same time, in accordance with the resolution, we call for the undiminished presence and action of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in an unchanged capacity, full scope and mandate. Resolution 1244 (1999), as the Council enacted it in 1999, is still in force. Either the Council cancels it, or it respects it. And if it does not respect it, then there is a question of whether the United Nations even any longer exists.

The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is at a very complex and politically important, and perhaps decisive, moment. On the one hand, with the agreements arrived at in Brussels on 27 February and in Ohrid on 28 March, with the mediation of the European Union (EU), we managed to preserve the momentum in the attempts to normalize relations. On the other hand, as the Secretary-General's report itself partially shows, there is still an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty and pressure towards Serbs and other non-Albanian communities on the ground.

First of all, it is necessary that all previous agreements — starting with the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, which I signed 10 years ago together with Catherine Ashton and Hashim Thaçi — be consistently and completely implemented. It is necessary to establish the association of Serbian municipalities as soon as possible, because that is the only possible mechanism for protecting the rights and security of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija.

In this very Chamber 10 years ago, on 14 June 2013, a meeting of the Security Council was held following the signing of the Brussels Agreement, where it was assessed as a document of historical importance. Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in his report (S/2013/254) that the Agreement provided for the establishment of an association of Serbian municipalities with a statute and a range of competencies. The Permanent Representative at the United States Permanent Mission at the time, Susan Rice, stated that the Agreement reaffirmed far-reaching municipal self-governance for ethnic Serbs in the north. French Ambassador Briens said that Kosovo must provide a future community of majority-Serb areas with substantive autonomy.

And what happened in those 10 years? Nothing. We are aware that Pristina is deliberately avoiding that obligation. It is devastating that they only started talking about this important topic on 2 May, even though it is recognized as a key and first step in the implementation of the European plan by none other than the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, who told the entire European community that the association of Serbian municipalities must be formed now.

Considering everything that has been done so far, we are certain that Kurti will never fulfil the obligation to form the association of Serbian municipalities, because peace and the success of the dialogue are not his goal; his goal is to expel all Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija. And as members know, the establishment of the association of Serbian municipalities is the first, and necessary, condition for the further implementation of the agreements reached in Brussels and Ohrid. In other words, it is necessary to ensure a dignified and normal life for all people living in Kosovo and Metohija.

I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia will take all legal, political and economic measures to protect the lives and basic human and political rights of Serbs and other non-Albanian populations in Kosovo and Metohija. In order to continue the comprehensive social and economic progress of Serbian communities, the Government of Serbia, through a special investment programme, will accelerate infrastructure development and increase financial support measures for the economy, farmers, youth and socially vulnerable categories.

The harsh truth is that, in the past 20 years, Kosovo and Metohija has turned from a multi-ethnic environment into an almost ethnically pure territory. I will repeat the

information that more than 40,000 Serbs once lived in Pristina, while today there are fewer than 100 of them. In the ancient imperial city of Prizren, where I was born and which today I need permission to visit, there used to be more than 10,000 Serbs, while today there are only about 20 left, and so on and so on. What words would members use to describe that phenomenon, according to which systematic work is being done to eliminate all Serbs while taking away all their rights? Is there support for such destructive actions, and who provides it?

It is devastating that, 24 years since resolution 1244 (1999) was adopted, the report still states the figure of 200,000 displaced people from Kosovo and Metohija. Returns are at such a low level — the report we are currently considering records 112 voluntary returns, of which 60 were Kosovo Serbs — that at this rate we will need centuries for all exiles to return to their homes. Members heard me right: centuries. The return rate, which is still less than 2 per cent — 1.9 per cent, to be exact — is the lowest percentage of returnees in post-conflict areas in the world. Is that information the result of the democratic development of Pristina and its contribution to the peaceful coexistence of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija? Does the Council really think that this issue should no longer be mentioned? That those who were expelled should forever remain so? Or does resolution 1244 (1999) — a resolution of this body — say otherwise?

We have also witnessed that Serbian Orthodox spiritual heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is subject to attacks by Kosovo Albanians on two grounds. They attribute that heritage as being part of medieval Albanian objects, or falsely present it as Byzantine or Illyrian. In the twenty-first century, we are witnessing the erasure of history, the destruction of certain buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the desecration of Orthodox cemeteries and the denial of the right to the freedom of religion. Citizens cannot even visit cemeteries holding their ancestors.

Is that the principle of the self-determination of some at the expense of eliminating others? Pristina's goal and intention to erase the traces of everything Serbian in Kosovo and Metohija is also evident in this action. Let us add to that the current trend of frequent ethnically motivated attacks on religious holidays. The wounding of the 11-year-old boy Stefan Stojanović and his 21-one-year old cousin Miloš Stojanović, whose sin was celebrating Orthodox Christmas and going to the forest to collect the holy Christmas tree, raises the question

of the kind of message we are sending to the remaining Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija. What opportunities have we created for the return of 200,000 Serbs who were exiled from Kosovo? What are the prospects for the remaining non-Albanian communities?

Resigned to the current state of democracy in Kosovo and Metohija, the legitimately elected representatives of the Serbs stepped out of political life, insisting on the fulfilment of well-known conditions: first, as was clearly supported here, the establishment of the association of Serbian municipalities, which is an international obligation for Pristina and was mentioned by this organ 10 years ago; the provision of the freedom of movement for Serbs; and the withdrawal of illegally deployed Albanian police forces from the north of Kosovo and Metohija. All that was stipulated in the Brussels Agreement. Belgrade supported this type of peaceful protest and considers the demands of the Serbian community logical and legitimate. I would like to remind the Council that during the last year, the basic democratic rights of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija were violated twice: when they were prevented from voting in the referendum and when, for the first time, voting was not carried out in the elections on 3 April, which is in direct contradiction of resolution 1244 (1999) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe decisions. Paradoxically, the current Pristina leadership insisted on the recent holding of special elections in four municipalities with a Serbian majority population.

Serbia is completely against the violent and illegal holding of extraordinary elections, because the motive for such a decision by the current leadership of Pristina is completely clear to us: it is a clear attempt to forcibly take away the rights and competencies of the Serbian community and establish full control. It is obvious that such a step has the support of some of the powerful minority, because recognizing the results of these extraordinary elections represents a type of defeat of democracy — that is, it represents the occupation of the north of Kosovo and Metohija. I would like to remind the Council that the elections were held violently, with great pressure, in containers secured by the same persons who shoot at Serbs and other non-Albanians.

Naturally, only 13 persons of Serbian nationality voted in those elections, out of a total of 45,095 people. Does it seem normal or legal, not to mention just, that barely 2 per cent of the population — the 1,500 Albanians who voted, out of 45,000 people — decide

the fate of 98 per cent of people, at a time of pronounced inter-ethnic tensions? And all of this is happening at a time when the issue of Pristina's membership in the Council of Europe is being forcibly considered. This blackmail and political manoeuvre aimed at delaying the formation of the association of Serbian municipalities for a full 10 years must be clearly and widely condemned. The current Albanian leadership does not even care about the statutes, let alone the common values of the institutions, the memberships of which it wants to use to fulfil its own, mundane political goals.

Pristina obviously believes that their precedent exceeds any right, and that their every move will still be met with understanding. That may be true, because the visa liberalization with the European Union they received does not include Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija — that is to say, Serbs are being discriminated against, compared to Albanians. All the mechanisms to prematurely strengthen Pristina's capacities only further aggravate and disenfranchise the Serbian community. If the absence of reaction means approval, then one justifiably gets the impression that the destructiveness of the current Pristina leadership in putting pressure on non-Albanian communities in Kosovo and Metohija is being legitimized and rewarded. This has special anti-democratic effects on the representatives of the Serbian List, the legitimate representatives of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija. Compared to the large numbers from the Kosovo security forces, who were released after only three months, the Vice-President of the Serbian List, Bratislav Nikolic, and four Serbs from Srpska have been imprisoned for 18 months now because of politically inspired accusations.

Owing to the extremely deteriorated security situation in the Province at the end of last year, Serbia, fully in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999), sent a request, which was not accepted, for the return of up to 1,000 members of the Serbian security forces to Kosovo and Metohija. So there would not be any dilemma, this is in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999), which the Council adopted. We insist that Kosovo Force (KFOR) invest additional efforts in ensuring the right to life and security of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija. During the last year, in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, in the municipalities with a majority Serb community, the so-called special units of the Regional Operations Support Unit made incursions as many as 12 times without the consent of KFOR and four mayors

of the municipalities. During this year, five such illegal incursions have already been registered. These kinds of incidents can cause a spiral of violence that is difficult to control.

I would like to take the opportunity to point out another negative course of action by the current Pristina leadership: the instrumentalization of the so-called representatives of special units and the police in fuelling inter-ethnic tensions. There are many examples, and it was the representative of the so-called “Kosovo Security Forces” who participated in the aforementioned attack on Serbian children during the celebration of a religious holiday. Therefore, we are very surprised that, contrary to international law and despite the warnings of the United Nations, the European Union and NATO, the transformation process of the so-called “Kosovo Security Forces” into the army continued. I remind the Council that, according to resolution 1244 (1999) and the Military Technical Agreement, only and exclusively the International Security Force (KFOR) have a mandate for all military aspects of security. How, if not as a threat, should we interpret the creation of strongholds and bases close to the administrative line on the territory in which exclusively Serbs live?

Of particular concern is the implementation of the arrangement on the inclusion of members of the so-called “Kosovo Security Forces” to the infantry troops of the armed forces of the United Kingdom in the Malvinas Islands. Such a move is in complete contradiction not only of resolution 1244 (1999), but also of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly concerning the peaceful settlement of the Malvinas Islands dispute.

Serbia’s strategic commitment is full membership in the European Union. We share and promote European values and advocate consistent compliance with the basic norms of international law, respecting the fundamental principles on which the United Nations was founded. In this sense, we are committed to the process of finding a sustainable solution in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which we consider to be of strategic interest for the entire region, Europe and the broader geopolitical picture. From my presentation so far, you have had the opportunity to hear only part of the problem and the unstable security situation in Kosovo and Metohija, through which the other side is deliberately preventing us from focusing our full attention on finding a compromise. A year is too much, let alone 10 years, for the fulfilment of assumed obligations.

We must not neglect these obligations, because in this way we will completely let down the people living in Kosovo and Metohija. We must sincerely dedicate ourselves to dialogue, but I am unfortunately convinced that on this occasion too, in the statement by the representative of Pristina, we will hear a series of accusations against Serbia regarding the apparently different interpretations of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, and the focus will be on the consequences of the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija. On this occasion, Serbian responsibility will be invoked, and Serbia will be portrayed as someone else’s instrument. It is interesting that the representatives of Pristina talk so lightly about patronage, but emphasize the sole responsibility of Serbia and Belgrade.

What they ignore is the loudness that their silence leaves. Not a single word is heard about their responsibility for the current security situation, nor about the failure to fulfil their obligations, such as the formation of the association of Serbian municipalities. I must once again clearly and unequivocally call for the unconditional and urgent formation of the association of Serbian municipalities in accordance with the Brussels Agreement. It is unacceptable that discussions on this important topic only start on 2 May, while simultaneously an action within the Council of Europe is being carried out that directly undermines this dialogue.

This is the twenty-fifth time that I speak before the Council about how important Kosovo and Metohija are for the Serbian people. The Serbian people have lived in Kosovo and Metohija for centuries and they will continue to do so. That is evidenced, among other things, by our historical, cultural and religious heritage, which we cannot and will not renounce.

We have heard that when people want to justify the violation of international law regarding the recognition of the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, they use the term *sui generis* as an alibi. It is true. It is true that for Serbia, Kosovo is *sui generis*. It is where Serbia was born. It is where the essence of Serbian history and orthodoxy lie. Four Serbian medieval churches on the UNESCO World Heritage List are located in Kosovo and Metohija — the Patriarchate of Peć from the thirteenth century, Our Lady of Ljeviška from 1307, Gračanica from 1321 and Visoki Dečani from 1335, all of which have been on the UNESCO list of endangered world heritage sites since 2006. And since 2021, Dečani has been on the list of the seven

most endangered cultural monuments in Europe. They threw grenades at Dečani. They wrote Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) graffiti on churches.

Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija do not respect the decisions of their courts with regard to church property. The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Porfirije, was banned from entering and performing religious ceremonies in Kosovo. He was banned from entering the Patriarchate of Peć, which has been the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church since the thirteenth century. And that is democracy. Those are human rights. Patriarch Porfirije was banned from entering Kosovo, but returnees of ISIS can enter freely. I want to remind the Council that as a percentage of the population, the largest number of foreign fighters in the world came from Kosovo, 350 in Syria and Iraq. Some 98 of them died for ISIS. Ninety-six of them remain.

So yes, it is true that for Serbia, Kosovo is *sui generis*, as Jerusalem is *sui generis* for the Jews, Mecca is *sui generis* for Muslims and the Vatican is *sui generis* for Catholics. That is why I want to state clearly here at United Nations Headquarters that Serbia cannot and will never recognize Kosovo's unilaterally declared independence or accept Kosovo becoming a member of the United Nations.

I have also reiterated several times that Serbia wants peace. We want to talk and contribute to achieving the long-desired normalization of conditions and the peaceful coexistence of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. At this stage of the dialogue, we have no time to waste and are obliged to truly dedicate ourselves to the final goal, which, at least for the Serbian side, represents peaceful coexistence and the normalization of the situation. As I mentioned earlier, at a time when the clamour for respect for the Charter of the United Nations has never been louder, we rightly expect those appeals to apply equally to all States Members of the United Nations. Today, regrettably, we are all aware of the consequences of support for Kosovo's 2008 unilateral declaration of independence. We tried to warn about the negative effects of that move, which were bound to open a Pandora's box in international relations. The so-called independence of Kosovo has led to serious turbulence in international relations, divisions among countries, globally and in international organizations and political groups alike.

Fifteen years after that declaration of so-called independence, I want to state very clearly, in my full

obligation as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia and my awareness of the position of all States Members of the United Nations on the issue, that in the past few years 28 countries have revoked their recognition of Kosovo, and of the 193 States Members of the United Nations, only 84 now recognize it. There is no way that Kosovo can become a member of the United Nations, as it does not have majority support. Anyone can ask the members of the Security Council to confirm that fact. I feel compelled to take this opportunity to once again express my gratitude to the majority of Member States that have not recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo out of their respect for international law, as we are aware that the danger posed by unilateral moves that lead to the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a State can spill over to other regions and countries in the world. In the end, I want to say only one thing to all members of the United Nations and to this respected body, which is that we must respect the Charter of the United Nations and the Organization's resolutions if we want the real effect and normalization of global action to be valid for everyone and applied without exceptions or double standards.

We are fully dedicated to dialogue. As the Council is aware, I signed the Brussels Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations 10 years ago. The other side is interested only in the independence of Kosovo. The Agreement adopted in Brussels is not about recognizing each other but rather on normalizing further relations. Whether that is too little for the representatives of Pristina is not up to us to decide. We will make every possible effort. We are ready to implement all the principles of the Agreement. However, before that, we must see that the obligations made more than 10 years ago to form the association of Serb-majority municipalities are being respected today. Otherwise there can be no agreement of any kind.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz: After the usual tirade of slander and complaints, and all the propaganda and claims that Serbia is being treated unfairly, I want to make a few brief remarks and then move on to the truly important — indeed, the real — developments for the people of Kosovo and the region.

Since instead of in English, Mr. Dačić spoke today in the language of the majority of his country, as his predecessors have done, I also wanted to communicate in

Albanian, which is the language spoken by the majority in my country, the Republic of Kosovo. Unfortunately the Council's presidency denied my request, so I will continue in English.

The report (S/2023/247) on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Serbia's aggressive behaviour and its threat to peace in the region, the alliance between Russia and Serbia around racism, as well as our young State's accomplishments and its position in Europe and the world, will all be significant factors. We can summarize the current UNMIK report by saying that more than 90 of its approximately 100 points contain small, large or severe errors, and that important developments and events are completely missing. Such serious deficiencies are not new. UNMIK's problems in our country and internationally have been known for many years. While a variety of worthy United Nations organizations are doing indispensable work for peace and stability all over the world, UNMIK has become a destabilizing factor and does not serve stability or peace in the region. The report has also documented how dispensable it has become. That brings me to the real developments that can provide hope for the region and therefore for peace and stability.

In the UNMIK report, the Berlin process, for example, appears only as a footnote. Neither the summit held in Berlin in November 2022 nor the summit held in Tirana — for the first time in the history of the Balkans — are mentioned in the report. However, the Berlin process is the most important, strategically European Union (EU)-oriented process for the entire region as an integral part of European efforts.

At the summit in Berlin, important agreements were signed, including on the mutual recognition of identity cards and professional and university degrees. Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia have ratified the agreements, while Montenegro seems to be close to doing so. However, the countries in which Vučić and Dačić have influence are blocking the process. Let us also state that Serbian President Vučić signed the agreements himself — yet the propaganda continues. It is internationally known by friend and foe alike that when Kosovo promises something, it keeps its word. We have not backed out of one signed agreement. That is not the case for Vučić, Dačić and others. Their political DNA makes it impossible for them to keep their word. If promises and given signatures are not honoured, negotiations become a farce. That is

uncivilized, outrageous and a sign of disrespect for the entire diplomatic community. The Serbian strategy is to block Balkan integration into Europe — and behind those attempts for power is Russia working via Serbia, its Balkan proxy. When dealing with people who engage in dishonest or unfair behaviour, it is important to take punitive action rather than negotiate with them. More and more voices in Europe, from Kosovo to the Netherlands and Germany, are now calling for sanctions against Serbia. Because you do not negotiate with cheaters — you have them face the consequences.

EU integration will eventually move forward without Serbia. That is true not only for the Berlin process but also for the EU's Common Regional Market project, which promotes integration into the EU market, and it applies to the dialogue between the Republic of Kosovo and Serbia as well. Serbia has largely disregarded signed agreements from 2011, 2013 and 2015. Vučić and Dačić are the main culprits to that constant breach of contract. When we speak about or examine the Balkans or the destabilizing factors there, we cannot neglect the real threat posed to the region by Russia and Serbia. We have seen it before our very eyes. The Security Council has stood witness to the reality of Russia's aggression against a peaceful neighbour. It has forced Europe and the world to make decisions — decisions to save lives and preserve humankind. Kosovo was one of those decisions — in which our allies stood up to end genocide as we now stand here for Ukraine. The EU rightly extends its solidarity with its European partner, Ukraine. Those who want to join the EU are particularly bound to the EU's common line. Serbia claims to have EU aspirations and has committed to that in agreements with the EU. However, we know Serbia's political games all too well. Vučić claims to be a European partner but has failed on the very agreements his country has signed. Instead of a common foreign policy with the EU, there is a common foreign policy with Russia. Instead of sanctions against the aggressor, Russia, Serbia actively makes itself available as a hub for Russia's dirty businesses in the areas of the economy, the military and smuggling.

Serbia is therefore actively supporting the war and genocide against Ukraine. Serbia's vote at the United Nations is worth nothing because Serbs are also helping Russia wage a barbaric war to destroy the existence of Ukraine. One can and will forget that Vučić and Dačić were enthusiastic supporters and accomplices of the first racial extermination wars since the Nazis, the Yugoslav-

Serbian wars of the 1990s. Today Putin is waging a barbaric war based on racial grounds. That of course is a classic dirty move by Putin. Putin had already sent troops to Pristina in 1999, and even today he is sending troops — the brutal Wagner Group troops that were sent to Serbia and our borders. However, the UNMIK report says nothing about that. As Russia's closest ally, Serbia is the biggest threat to peace in the Balkans. Vučić, Dačić, Šešelj and Vulin live in the dangerous world of Serbian supremacy. Serbia has decided on a "Serbian World" as a Government programme, a 2.0 version of Greater Serbia. It documents the pathology of a nationalist ideology that still seeks revenge for a defeat that occurred more than 500 years ago instead of looking towards the future.

There are concrete and strategic reasons that peace, development and prosperity can remain possible for the region and how conflict has been prevented. The reason lies in the presence of troops from the United States and NATO in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. That alone holds back Russia and Serbia from completely escalating their aggression. Despite the military exercises by Serbia with Russia, which increased in number from about 10 to nearly 100 in 2021, despite the Russian military and spy bases near Kosovo disguised as humanitarian centres, despite the Serbian troops and fighter jets at our border and despite Vučić's hybrid warfare against Kosovo — with propaganda campaigns in the media, alliances with organized crime and threats against the Serbian citizens of Kosovo who reject his line — it is clear to observers that without the presence of NATO and the United States, there could be war already.

On 17 February, our Independence Day, the Republic of Kosovo celebrated its fifteenth anniversary of independence in perfect weather and great spirits. Of course, that was not mentioned either in the UNMIK report. Kosovo received congratulations from all over the world — from Asia to Africa, Europe, and North and South America. In Pristina there was a grand, peaceful and impressive parade of our Kosovar defence forces and police on that day. The joy, optimism and composure with which people celebrated our fifteenth Independence Day on the streets were contagious. Equally impressive is the pride of our citizens for the Kosovo army, which is modern and becoming increasingly stronger and is internationally experienced.

Kosovo is proud to say that, together with our partners and allies in NATO and the EU, we are now a guarantor of freedom and peace in the region. We are

also committed to our goal of becoming more deeply and closely integrated into NATO, because that also serves our peace and our freedom. Kosovo is pleased and proud to belong to the family of countries that stand strongly for the Charter of the United Nations. In contrast, Serbia is increasing its dependence on Russia, most recently in an agreement signed by Lavrov and his Serbian counterpart that forces Serbia to coordinate its foreign policy with Russia — and not with the EU. Kosovo has learned the lessons of history. We echo these words in the Chamber and for the world to hear: never again. Never again will Kosovo be a defenceless victim of aggression and genocide. Never again will there be destruction. Never again will there be genocide by Serbia. Never again will we, together with our allies, stand defenceless. We have allies, and we are capable of defending our country and citizens against that aggression.

Kosovo has significantly strengthened its path towards European integration. We are strengthening the rule of law and combating corruption and crime more effectively than ever before. Kosovo is an example of what is possible when a country decides to clean up corruption and move with full force towards the rule of law and Europe.

That is also why Kosovo is a provocation for the regime in Belgrade. Kosovo has fully demonstrated that it is possible to shake off corruption and choose new people and a new beginning over resignation. That is a direct threat to the Belgrade model of Government and concept of the rule of law. In the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Kosovo has moved up 20 places in the past two years. That huge leap is a testament to our progress. Based on every metric used to measure democracy, Kosovo is the most democratic country in the Balkans, as we have shown time and again. Meanwhile, based on the same metrics, Serbia is no longer even recognized as a democratic country.

The future of Kosovo lies in Europe and the West because Kosovo is part of the West. We are well integrated into the region, having signed dozens of bilateral agreements to strengthen regional cooperation in many areas. Kosovo has never previously had the number of foreign representatives and high-level officials from all over the world that it has welcomed in the past two years, including from countries that have not recognized us. Kosovo has seen a significant increase in foreign investment, as well as tax revenues

and growth, with a 10 per cent increase in 2021. International companies are exploring opportunities for investment, and many have already invested or are on their way to doing so. We therefore also have reason to be optimistic in that area.

Guests from all over the world accepted our President's invitation to a global conference on women and peace and security, a successful premiere for our young country. We have worked hard and successfully to lift the restrictions on visa-free travel from the EU by the end of this year. Despite significant opposition from Serbia, we achieved a major victory by securing a large majority in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe agreed on opening the doors for the Republic of Kosovo to become a member. We are immensely grateful for that and are committed to doing everything in our power to ensure that Kosovo, as has been aptly said, takes its rightful place at the international table of nations.

The Serbia of Vučić and Dačić is not Europe. It looks eastward, to the relics of past Powers. It consistently betrays the agreements signed with the West. Just this week, Vučić has again defamed European representatives as liars and cheats, as Westerners. He even claimed to disagree with almost everything in the interim results of the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. It is also apparent that Serbia does not want an agreement through the dialogue. On the contrary, it wants to obstruct any agreement. That is because the Serbia of 2023 no longer wants to join the European Union. Vučić and Dačić want the EU's billions, but they do not want to accept the EU's values, the rule of law or free media at any price. That would endanger their power and control. Vučić and Dačić want a European order led by Moscow. However, such an order cannot and will not exist. The EU, NATO and the United Nations cannot and will not allow an order in which war, invasion and violence become politics.

Unfortunately, Serbia has not learned the lessons of history. Those responsible for genocide are still in power in the Serbian Government. The current Serbian President, Aleksandar Vučić, was Minister of Propaganda for the war criminal Milošević during the genocide against Kosovo. To some extent, he is still acting more like a propaganda minister than a President. The right-hand man of the so-called butcher of the Balkans — the war criminal Milošević, who was responsible for Serbian wars and genocides in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo — is the man

who just spoke before me. He has endless blood on his hands, as does his President. Not a word of regret has been uttered. Instead, there is contempt for the victims, twisting of the truth and celebration of mass murderers. The facade of a sometime-singing politician does not change historical truth.

I will say it in Albanian and as a single sentence in the Serbian language, too. Ivica Dačić, now Serbia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, is responsible for mass murder, rape as a weapon of war and war crimes, and he should be brought before a war crimes tribunal. From 1992 until 2000, Dačić was the right-hand man of the butcher of the Balkans, Slobodan Milošević. He celebrated him as a hero and became his successor. He and Vučić were Milošević's closest allies. They are accomplices in genocide. Yet here we are, sitting across from him. We will negotiate with him and his accomplice, Vučić. We will negotiate because it is we who want to preserve peace and achieve a lasting solution to the conflict. We, the victims of genocide and brutality, are honourable and wish to establish peace not only for us but for the region. We are the people of Kosovo.

We know that there is also a better Serbia — a Serbia that is still weak, but European, and a Serbia that wants to stop being a threat to its neighbours. We are waiting for that Serbia and hope that it comes as soon as possible. The citizens of Serbia can take their destiny into their own hands. They can vote out racism, hate and incitement and investigate the terrible crimes of the past and bring the perpetrators to justice. They can extend a hand to all their neighbours, not just Kosovo, for peaceful coexistence and eventually cooperation. All of that is possible. A country can make a new decision. Kosovo and others have shown that it can be done. We remain vigilant, cautious and sceptical, but open to serious reconciliation that does not betray justice. We want to work with all of Kosovo's neighbours — including our difficult neighbour to the north — wherever possible, for the sake of the region's future and for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

Today is our national day of missing persons, a tribute to those who were forcibly disappeared in Kosovo. Every year, we remember the more than 1,600 people who were presumably abducted, killed and buried by the Serbian military and militias. A refusal to show respect for the dead and their families or to provide the International Committee of the Red Cross with locations, a boycott of the International Criminal

Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the denial of the chance for families to mourn and find closure are all elements of the face of Serbian extremism. Serbia has appointed Veljko Odalović, who is responsible for war crimes in Kosovo, as the representative of its national commission on this sensitive issue. It is hard to imagine a more contemptuous and cynical choice. Kosovo has offered to search every square metre of its territory for possible missing persons, using the latest and most effective technologies. Serbia is blocking progress in that regard, too.

Today marks the anniversary of an unspeakable mass murder. On this day exactly 24 years ago — 27 April 1999 — in a Catholic village in Kosovo, at least 377 children, women and men were barbarically killed by Serbian police and military personnel. The village was attacked with grenade launchers and houses were set on fire in a barbaric act of annihilation. Not only in Kosovo but elsewhere, every child knows that Vučić, Dačić and others in the leadership of Serbia are political accomplices and responsible for those and other terrible massacres. As a State, Kosovo will investigate and address such crimes as a legal obligation, and the rule of law will hold accountable those responsible for the war, genocide and all crimes committed. It may take time, but justice will prevail. All impunity for Dačić, Vučić and others will come to an end.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): While I thank Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz for her statement in my capacity as President of the Security Council, I reject her assertion that the presidency did not allow her to deliver her statement in Albanian. The presidency was informed that she was prepared to speak in English, as her predecessor did previously. If Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz had unequivocally insisted on speaking in Albanian — for which there is certainly precedent, although I would like to draw Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz's attention to the fact that those speakers did not speak any of the official United Nations languages — we would have enabled her to do that.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I begin by welcoming the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić, to whom we listened closely. I thank Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of

the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for her informative briefing. We take note of the briefing by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Ecuador appreciates the efforts of the Special Representative and UNMIK personnel in promoting security, stability and respect for human rights. The work of UNMIK can move forward only through efficient and constructive cooperation with Pristina and Belgrade, their communities and the regional and international actors. Ecuador supports finding a solution within the framework of and pursuant to resolution 1244 (1999).

We acknowledge the efforts made by the parties, especially the fact that measures have been taken to de-escalate the tensions that arose last year, and we urge them to continue in that direction and refrain from adopting unilateral measures that could exacerbate tensions and get in the way of achieving lasting peace.

The process of normalizing relations must include civil society, especially women and young people, in all relevant discussions, and they must actively participate in those discussions in order to ensure that their needs and expectations are taken into account.

Ecuador defers to the guidance provided by the European Union in the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. We acknowledge the work of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and European Union Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák for their continued efforts in that regard. We hope that the parties will continue to engage constructively and in good faith and honour their commitment to abide by the agreement. Undoubtedly, the new framework for negotiations gives hope for achieving lasting solutions and ensuring the maintenance of peace and stability in the Balkan region within the current complex geopolitical context.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the lack of progress on the issue of missing persons who have remained unaccounted for since 1999. We hope that, with the support of UNMIK, the best way to provide relief for their families will be found, which is an important humanitarian aspect of the reconciliation process.

The incidents of gender-based and sexual violence, including the femicides, mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/247) are another issue of

concern and underscore the need for the adoption of policies by the authorities that will ramp up efforts to ensure the effective protection of, and access to justice and support services for, the survivors of gender-based and domestic violence. Those responsible for such acts cannot remain unpunished.

As in all such situations, Ecuador calls on all actors concerned to exercise the utmost restraint and tolerance. Similarly, we expect that they carry out their actions with the highest degree of responsibility. Accordingly, I would like to avail myself of Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz's presence at this meeting to reiterate the condemnation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States of the potential presence of members of the so-called "Kosovo Security Forces" in South America, which would constitute an unjustified provocation and would contravene the relevant United Nations resolutions governing the issue.

Ecuador acknowledges the outstanding work carried out by UNMIK in the reconciliation process, especially its focus on the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, the youth, peace and security agenda, and the rule of law. The work done by UNMIK has been solidified into confidence-building measures for the different communities, thereby enabling new generations to be more inclusive and just in the future.

In conclusion, I also reiterate my acknowledgment of the work of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to build lasting peace in the region.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh for her briefing today. I welcome the presence at this meeting of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of the Republic of Kosovo.

Malta acknowledges the importance of the role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in promoting security, stability, the preservation and promotion of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and young people in Kosovo. We also acknowledge the importance of the role played by the European Union in providing stability to the situation in the region and facilitating the ongoing discussions between both parties.

Malta welcomes the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia and underlines its firm belief that the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue remains of crucial importance. That result could not have been achieved had it not been for the ongoing work and sustained efforts of all those engaged in the dialogue. The developments demonstrate that solutions are possible through constructive engagement. The Agreement will hopefully serve as a basis for further progress and continued improved relations. We encourage both sides to build on this momentum and fully implement all their obligations in the Agreement without delay. The success of the Agreement will depend on the political will to implement it.

We are, however, concerned with some of the facts presented in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/247), such as the reported assaults on civilians, as well as reports of intimidation and excessive use of force by special operations units. We call on both sides to de-escalate tensions and refrain from any unilateral action or divisive rhetoric that could undo the advancements made to date.

Positive steps to create an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation, good-neighbourly relations and further dialogue are what is needed at this juncture. We stress once again that dialogue is key in resolving outstanding issues, and collaboration is the only way to ensure peace and stability in the region. The normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia will undoubtedly lead to further economic and social prosperity in the region. Furthermore, increased cooperation between Pristina and Belgrade will also result in increased stability in the Western Balkans.

We maintain our continued support for Kosovo's reforms and for its efforts in its path towards EU membership. We acknowledge the progress, including in the rule of law and public administration, and we continue to support focused efforts in this regard. Moreover, we encourage reforms to address the needs of all members of society and call for wide consultations with the various stakeholders from within civil society, including vulnerable and marginalized communities. To this end, we very much welcome President Osmani's convening of a high-level regional forum of women, peace and security.

Reported incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, including femicide and child marriage, are alarming. We commend efforts to strengthen the

criminal code, the criminal procedural code and the Protocol for the Treatment of Sexual Violence Cases and the Law on Protection of and Prevention from Domestic Violence, Violence against women and Gender-based Violence.

Malta reiterates its support for UNMIK in its efforts to actively and constructively engage with Pristina and Belgrade, all communities in Kosovo, as well as regional and international actors. We now look forward to seeing more robust political commitment to implementing the agreement reached in the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue, which will continue to shape the way forward in the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, for her briefing.

Since its establishment in 1999, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has played an important role in supporting Kosovo as it builds its Constitution, Government and Parliament. Even after the Mission's reconfiguration, UNMIK's work continues to contribute to peace and stability in Kosovo and the region.

Japan commends UNMIK staff for their commitment, and we thank Special Representative Ziadeh for her leadership and active engagement with local and international partners, particularly during periods of high tension, to encourage de-escalation, promote mutual trust at the grass-roots level, and pursue efforts to settle outstanding issues.

We were concerned that tensions between Kosovo and Serbia escalated late last year. However, as a result of the efforts of the parties, both sides agreed on the "Agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia" proposed by the European Union (EU) on 27 February, followed by the "Implementation Annex" of the Agreement on 18 March. Japan welcomes these agreements and closely monitors the developments.

We also recognize that the situation in Kosovo is very different from when UNMIK was established. Therefore, while taking into account the political and social developments and efforts made by all stakeholders involved thus far, we believe it is necessary to review UNMIK's functions and mandate, including the possibility of reducing or eliminating overlaps with the activities of the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Japan attaches great importance to the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. The normalization of relations between the two countries through the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue will contribute to peace and stability in the Western Balkans. Japan expects both countries to implement the Agreement in good faith.

Furthermore, we continue to support Kosovo's efforts towards EU membership. We believe that the ongoing reforms and progress in the country will lead to further steps in this direction. We encourage Kosovo to continue working towards improving its economy, governance and human rights situation and to engage constructively in the EU-facilitated dialogue towards this end.

In conclusion, Japan remains committed to supporting the international community's efforts to promote peace, stability and reconciliation in the region. We stand ready to work with all stakeholders to achieve this goal.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, for her briefing.

Today's meeting takes place in the context of significant progress made towards the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and we welcome this, even if I must say that the tone this morning of the two Deputy Prime Ministers/Foreign Ministers from Serbia and Kosovo was quite disturbing. We welcome the spirit of responsibility of both parties, which made it possible to reach an agreement in principle in Brussels on 27 February and an agreement on the implementation annex in Ohrid on 18 March.

This progress was achieved thanks to the efforts of European mediation, and France was also active at the highest level in supporting the mediation. The President of the Republic and the Minister for Foreign Affairs had exchanges with Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić, along with Chancellor Olaf Scholz, at the margins of the Munich Security Conference.

We now expect Serbia and Kosovo to commit themselves unreservedly, in good faith and with the same spirit of compromise to the immediate implementation of all their pledges under to the agreement, among which the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo is fundamental. The meeting

between President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti that will take place next Tuesday in Brussels should make it possible to launch concrete and substantial discussions on draft legislation. We also welcome the establishment last week of a joint committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

The agreement strengthens the European prospects for Serbia and Kosovo, prospects to which France reiterates its full commitment. We recall that all the provisions of the agreement and its implementation annex are now an integral part of the commitments of both parties with respect to their European prospects.

It is essential in the coming weeks to avoid a new crisis on the ground so as not to disrupt the positive momentum that has been set in motion. We therefore call on both parties to show restraint and refrain from any unilateral measures that could fuel tensions. We encourage Kosovo and Serbia to find solutions on all current issues, including the issue of licence-plate conversion and the supply of electricity to northern Kosovo.

We have noted the holding of elections in four municipalities in northern Kosovo on 23 April, and we welcome the absence of incidents. In this regard, we commend the high level of professionalism of the Kosovo Police, the NATO Kosovo Force and the European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. However, we regret the low voter turnout and the lack of participation of some political parties. In this context, these elections cannot be a long-term political solution for the municipalities concerned. The priority must be the establishment of the association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo and the return of Serbs to Kosovar institutions.

Finally, we welcome the efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to support the dialogue process and strengthen social cohesion within Kosovar society. France will remain fully active in support of the dialogue facilitated by the European Union in order to obtain rapid progress towards the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. There is no other way, either for Serbia or for Kosovo, than to reach a comprehensive, final and legally binding agreement to sustainably resolve the dispute between the two countries.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking the Special Representative for her briefing and for the work her team is doing to promote stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo.

Over the last year, Kosovo's democracy and institutions have continued to show their maturity. This is reflected in its climb up international rankings on political and civil liberties. Kosovo demonstrated the third highest increase of any country in 2022. We congratulate Kosovo on this improvement. We welcome the Government's efforts to tackle corruption and strengthen the rule of law and its commitment to addressing domestic and gender-based violence.

We recognize the important role the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has played in supporting Kosovo's remarkable progress over the past 24 years and the work it continues to do today. And let me be clear, we remain fully supportive of resolution 1244 (1999).

The conditions on the ground are, however, unrecognizable from 1999 and, in line with our normal Council practice on other mandates, we believe it is time for a review of UNMIK's role and responsibilities. That would allow the Council to take a fresh look at how UNMIK can adapt to serve the current conditions in Kosovo.

For many years, the absence of a normal relationship between Kosovo and Serbia has had implications for regional stability and communities in both countries. We therefore welcome the considerable progress that has been made in the normalization dialogue facilitated by the High Representative of the European Union, including the 27 February Brussels Agreement and its implementation annex negotiated on 18 March in Ohrid, North Macedonia. Now is the moment for both parties to engage in the dialogue in good faith, honour their commitments and avoid actions or rhetoric that could reduce prospects for a comprehensive and sustainable normalization agreement.

Kosovo and Serbia have committed to the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities. We urge both parties to engage swiftly and constructively, so that the association can be established as soon as possible. We strongly encourage both sides to demonstrate the political will and courage to deliver on what has been agreed. That is in the long-term interests of the citizens on both sides.

There are more immediate challenges too. Instead of a secure and safe environment in the north of Kosovo, there is a continuing security vacuum that leaves communities isolated and without vital everyday services. We welcome the role played by the Kosovo

Force and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, but that cannot be the long-term solution. We need to support functioning institutions in the north, working to serve the interests of those they were elected to represent.

Let me finish by reiterating that the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting an inclusive, diverse and multi-ethnic democracy in Kosovo and its full participation in the international system.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for her statement and for the Mission's work.

This is the first time that Switzerland is speaking on Kosovo as a member of the Security Council. This issue is close to our hearts, both politically and socially. More than 20 years ago, Switzerland welcomed thousands of refugees from all over the Western Balkans. Today they are an integral part of Swiss society and contribute to our close ties with the region. Switzerland was among the first countries to recognize Kosovo as an independent State. The future of Kosovo, its people and lasting peace in the region are important to us.

Switzerland is committed to ensuring peaceful, multi-ethnic and prosperous societies — societies that respect and defend human rights and the rule of law — in Kosovo and in the Western Balkans as a whole. We welcome Kosovo's progress, in particular in the fight against corruption and organized crime. We support Kosovo's European prospect and its integration into international structures and institutions.

Cooperation between Kosovo and the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mission in Kosovo and the Council of Europe, as well as United Nations agencies, have contributed to that positive development. We also recognize the important and long-standing work that UNMIK has undertaken since 1999. In order for the United Nations to be effective, its presence must be commensurate with reality. As such, Switzerland is ready to constructively discuss a possible strategic review of UNMIK.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/247) describes an eventful six months. I would like to emphasize three points.

First, it is essential to work on confidence-building between Kosovo and Serbia. Switzerland welcomes the agreement on the path to normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, facilitated by the European Union (EU). The effective normalization of relations remains essential to build common ground, preserve stability and prevent a resurgence of the conflict. The challenge now is to maintain that positive momentum and to ensure that the commitments made in the agreement are fully implemented. Sustainable progress can be achieved only through a continued sincere, constructive and inclusive dialogue. Switzerland is contributing to that by providing an informal platform for exchanges between representatives of political parties on both sides, in support of the EU-led normalization process. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women must be ensured throughout the process.

My second point is on the security situation, which has deteriorated in recent months. Switzerland deplores the new tensions observed in northern Kosovo in particular. We call on the parties to avoid any action or rhetoric that could hinder the prospects for reconciliation and lasting peace. We condemn the increase in intercommunal incidents, which increase the sense of insecurity and mistrust between the communities and thereby undermine their rapprochement. In that context, KFOR continues to play an essential role as a guarantor of stability and security in Kosovo. In recognition of that, Switzerland is providing its largest military peacekeeping contingent to that mission.

With respect to the recent local elections, Switzerland regrets that the Kosovo Serb community did not participate. We encourage Kosovo's leaders to pursue dialogue with the representatives of the Serb minority.

Finally, dealing with the past is essential to prevent a resurgence of the conflict. The right to know, the right to justice, the right to reparations and the right to guarantees of non-repetition for all victims, regardless of their affiliation, strengthen a society's resilience. We welcome the Kosovo Government's inclusive draft transitional justice strategy. We call on the parties to cooperate in that regard, with a victim- and survivor-centred approach, and with regard to sexual violence committed during the conflict. Switzerland supports a renewed commitment to making further progress on the issue of enforced disappearances and the continued engagement of the International Committee of the Red Cross to that end.

We call on Serbia and Kosovo to continue their efforts to build on the progress made towards peace and security in Europe. Mindful of the countless family and cultural ties that bind us to the region, we will accompany the Western Balkans on that path.

Ms. Oppong-Ntiri (Ghana): Let me begin by welcoming the presence of His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. I thank Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for her briefing. My delegation also takes note of the remarks made by Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz.

While the war drums of the 1998 Kosovo crisis have long stopped beating, the legacy of political and inter-ethnic tensions continue to echo with the risk of renewed violent conflict. We therefore reaffirm the centrality of resolution 1244 (1999) in the efforts by the United Nations to support the process of finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the decades-long problem.

Despite the heightened tensions over the past six months, we note the significant advancements that continue to be made towards the normalization of relations between the Kosovo region and Serbia, and we are encouraged by the demonstration of political commitment by the parties to forge past the prevailing challenges in their mutual interests.

We have in our previous statements to the Council advocated support for the path to dialogue to evolve the relations between the Kosovo region and Serbia and welcome the extensive and constructive discussions between the two sides within the framework of the European Union-facilitated dialogue. In particular, we welcome the new agreement on the path to the normalization of relations reached on 27 February in Brussels and the implementation annex, which was concluded in Ohrid, North Macedonia, on 18 March. The 11-point agreement and its implementation annex offer another opportunity to resolve contentious issues and pave the way towards peace, stability, economic and social advancement for all groups of people in the Kosovo region. The implementation of the agreement, we believe, would also help to address persisting crises relating to the recognition of formal documents, symbols and vehicle license plates.

It bears emphasizing, however, that the promise of the new deal can be realized only through an unprecedented level of commitment by all sides to the normalization process. We encourage the intensification of efforts towards the full and effective implementation of the agreement and note the establishment, earlier this month, of the Joint Monitoring Committee. We urge all parties to act in good faith and guard against the agreement falling into abeyance, as was the case with the numerous preceding agreements.

We further urge the continuing support of the European Union and other partners to help transition the agreement to actual implementation. Returning normalcy to the Kosovo region is essential for the people, but also necessary for the realization of wider peace efforts in the Balkan region.

We continue to be concerned about the heightened tensions in the northern Kosovo region and reiterate our call for de-escalation and restraint. Authorities must endeavour to avoid inflammatory rhetoric and provocative actions.

The low turnout in local elections held on 23 March highlights serious divisions in the fibre of the society but, more importantly, shows the need for continuing dialogue to identify a credible process for the return of Kosovo Serbs to administrative institutions. We also urge the constructive engagement of the parties on the creation of the association of Serb-majority municipalities and related questions on its status in line with the normalization agreement and previous commitments.

The unresolved issue of some 1,600 missing persons remains a sticking point that, we believe, must be addressed from a humanitarian standpoint and not politicized. We encourage mutual cooperation to unearth the facts about those missing persons in order to help dispel unsubstantiated narratives that perpetuate distrust among the ethnic groups in the Kosovo region.

We remain supportive of UNMIK's mandate, aimed at promoting security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo. As evidenced by the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/247) and the briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General, conditions in the region are far from normal and stable. In our view, the situation can benefit only from the trust-building efforts, social-cohesion measures and enhanced intercommunal engagements facilitated by UNMIK.

We also take a positive view of UNMIK's continuing initiatives with women and young people in order to enhance their peacemaking and peacebuilding capacities. Other measures aimed at building resilience in the communities are strongly encouraged.

In conclusion, we wish to underscore that normalization efforts to resolve the Kosovo crisis must be anchored in the rules of international law and the core values of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I would also like to begin by thanking Special Representative Ziadeh for her informative briefing, and I welcome the participation of Mr. Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, today.

The United Arab Emirates has a strong relationship and affinity with both Kosovo and Serbia. Those ties were marked just last month, during the visit of Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan to both Belgrade and Pristina on a regional tour. During the visit, discussions focused on bilateral relations and regional stability and prosperity.

Peace is not a simple story of a before and after. There are many chapters. The recent agreement between Serbia and Kosovo is the most significant breakthrough in relations between both States in over a decade, and we must all support that welcome trajectory.

The United Arab Emirates therefore welcomes the agreement reached in Brussels in February on the path to normalization, as well as the implementation road map agreed in Ohrid last month. Neither would have been possible without the leadership and goodwill of both parties. We commend the European Union (EU) for its dedication in facilitating dialogue and diplomacy. The United Arab Emirates affirms its full support for those efforts.

We are pleased to see concrete steps towards the implementation of those agreements, such as the establishment of the Joint Monitoring Committee. While the resolve of each party has led them from the ashes of war to agreement, taking it from the drawing board to reality is the next chapter and necessitates considerable work ahead, as we heard in the Chamber today.

Last week's events provided a glimpse of the remaining challenges on the ground. Sunday's local elections in Kosovo, conducted without the participation

of significant political actors in the four Serb-majority municipalities in the north, underlined the complexity of the situation.

That said, the Brussels and Ohrid agreements offer the possibility of a path forward. By outlining specific measures that can support stability and strengthen civic participation, there is greater clarity today on the ways in which the situation can be improved, not only in those municipalities, but across Kosovo as a whole.

A further step of profound significance is the EU's announcement that Kosovo and Serbia have agreed on the text of the declaration on missing persons. An endorsed declaration can help to provide closure to families while honouring those who are no longer with us. And we offer our full support to Kosovo and Serbia's renewed commitment on that critical matter.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to build trust and social cohesion across Kosovo. By promoting initiatives and forums that enhance constructive engagement between communities, they play an important role in building mutual understanding, tolerance and dialogue — the cornerstones of sustainable peace. Those pillars of their work could be developed further.

We have witnessed in our own region, the Middle East, the value and the tangible impact that intercommunal dialogue can have. That process is essential for securing prosperity, not only within Kosovo, but also in the wider region.

That said, we know that the path to reconciliation is fraught, and we remain deeply concerned about the continued reports of vandalism and theft targeting cultural and religious sites in Kosovo. Though not widespread, acts such as these can sow division and should be dealt with firmly. We support efforts from Government and civic leaders to counter such acts.

In conclusion, we cannot change the past, but we can shape our future. For that future to be secure and stable, we look to Serbia and Kosovo's leaders to maintain their commitment to EU-facilitated dialogue and to implementing the agreements that have been reached. In doing so, they can ensure that the hard-earned peace endures.

For our part, the United Arab Emirates is fully committed to supporting these efforts so that the next chapter ushers in an era of peace and prosperity for

the peoples of Serbia and Kosovo, but also the wider region — one that all these people so rightly deserve.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): I thank Special Representative Caroline Ziadeh for her briefing. I welcome to this meeting the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and acknowledge the participation of the representatives of Kosovo.

Brazil commends the parties for the instances of continued engagement in dialogue and negotiations, which resulted in the agreement on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina in February and its implementation annex in March. We believe that this is a positive development, with the expectation that it will reinforce both sides' commitment to a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the question of Kosovo. We welcome the constructive role played by the European Union in mediating the negotiations.

It is concerning, however, that progress on other fronts, such as the road map for the implementation of the 2013 and 2015 energy agreements, remains limited. Brazil notes the persistence of tensions between communities, particularly in north Kosovo, reflected in the boycott of local elections last Sunday. We consider it important that parties adopt confidence-building measures and avoid unilateral actions that could trigger violence.

Brazil reiterates the call for the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, in accordance with the Brussels agreements. We encourage parties to adhere to their commitment to respecting sites of historical, cultural or religious significance and to preserving freedom of movement.

Brazil supports the continuity of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. We understand that it would be premature to consider its withdrawal at this time. We believe that the Mission still has an important role to play in preventing intercommunal conflicts, especially in fighting misinformation and hate speech and engaging young people in the peace process.

Finally, I would like to express Brazil's concern about the presence of troops from Kosovo in the Malvinas Islands. The sending of foreign troops to that territory is in violation of General Assembly resolution 31/49 and goes against the spirit of resolution 41/11, which solemnly declared the South Atlantic a zone of peace and cooperation. Brazil reiterates its firm support for Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas and urges Member States to refrain from unilateral actions concerning the territory.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): First, I need to set the record straight regarding the use of languages in the Council and in today's meeting. Two Council members backed a formal request made by the delegation of Kosovo to speak in the language of its choice. As we know, rule 44 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure speaks of any representative being able to make a statement in a language other than the languages of the Security Council and to provide for interpretation into one of those languages. That was provided by Kosovo to the appropriate services, in writing. Russia, as President, opposed it, and that is also in writing.

We were not happy, of course, and we believe that the presidency was not impartial in its role, but in order not to put the Council in a difficult position we went along with the ruling, although it goes against the rules and the spirit of multilingualism that is at the heart of the United Nations and against precedent in the Chamber. It was mentioned that there were precedents, and I can inform the Council that in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2018, there have been cases in which another language was used in the Council by both delegations. Telling us now that we should have insisted, although I have not heard how many times we should have insisted, is just ridiculous. We thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo for her understanding and for her respect for the Council in not putting it in the difficult position of having to vote on the issue. That is the only truth.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadeh for her briefing and for her efforts. We welcome the presence at today's meeting of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of the Republic of Kosovo, Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, and of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, and thank them for their statements.

There have been important developments since our last meeting, in October 2022 (see S/PV.9155), and they are worth mentioning. First, on 15 December 2022, Kosovo delivered to the President of the European Union its application for membership of the European Union (EU). We congratulate the Government and the people of Kosovo for their continued strategic commitment to their European and Euro-Atlantic perspective, as well as for their faithful alignment with the common foreign and security policy of the European Union.

Secondly, on 23 April, the European Parliament granted a visa-free travel regime to the citizens of Kosovo. In that way, as of January next year, if not earlier, Kosovo joins all the other countries of the Western Balkans and only 61 countries in the world in benefiting from visa-free travel in the Schengen area. It represents an important foundation for the future and for ever closer cooperation between the European Union and Kosovo.

Thirdly, on 21 April, just a few days ago, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided to accept the request of Kosovo for membership in the organization and send it to the Parliamentary Assembly to give an opinion, as per the procedures. That is a historic step and another milestone on the irreversible path of Kosovo to integrating what the world knows as the best body the world has ever seen for promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of a Government for the people.

Furthermore, and by no means least, the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has delivered. The agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia and its implementation annex, agreed in Ohrid on 18 March 2023, are historic milestones. According to them, Kosovo and Serbia have agreed to develop normal good-neighbourly relations with each other, on the basis of equal rights, and recognize each other's documents and national symbols, including passports and licence plates. The text clearly stipulates that neither can represent the other in the international arena and that Serbia, and this is very important, will not object to Kosovo's membership in international organizations. That appears in the last line of article 4 of the agreement, in black and white.

I was therefore very surprised — baffled, to tell the truth — to hear Mr. Dačić state quite the opposite here, even more so since he was calling on the Government of Kosovo to abide by agreements reached between the parties. We commend Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and Gabriel Escobar, United States Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, as well as the Special Envoys of France and Germany, for their important contributions to the process. As we know, however, agreements have meaning only if they are implemented. We expect the parties to implement their commitments in full, in good faith and without

delay for the benefit of both Kosovo and Serbia and their respective citizens. That is the only way to chart a clear path and show leadership through concrete commitments, which will lead to a new chapter in relations between the two countries.

Recently, Kosovo organized snap elections in four municipalities. They were held in accordance with the country's constitutional requirements after the resignation of former elected officials, and were conducted in an exemplary manner. We regret the fact that the Serb list, representing the Serb community in the municipalities concerned, chose not to participate, which affected both the participation and the outcome. In democracy, a boycott may be a right, but it is never a good choice, as it deprives those concerned of direct participation in areas in which their interests are involved. The Serb community in Kosovo has the right to have its representatives at all levels. The country's Constitution and legal framework guarantee it. But for that to happen, the respective political representatives must act accordingly and responsibly and make use of the formidable space they have. Kosovo is their country. We hope that the implementation of the agreement reached with Brussels within the dialogue will make it possible to quickly find the best solution. In addition, as today is Kosovo's national day of missing persons, we urge both countries to do much more to find out what happened to the more than 1,600 persons still unaccounted for, and to close that open wound.

These developments help us understand the environment in which the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is currently operating. Kosovo is not a frozen conflict, and every wave of tensions we have witnessed there is artificially generated and totally avoidable. Kosovo is a fast-developing country that is gradually finding its place on the European and international stage according to the choice of its citizens. The level of stability and the prospect of the EU-facilitated dialogue, as I mentioned, through the implementation of agreements, only amplify the need to think seriously about UNMIK's future. The UNMIK mandate was defined a quarter of century ago, based on a post-conflict situation that is a bygone reality. As such, its roots lie in the past. But Kosovo, like the entire region, has changed considerably, way more than the ability of UNMIK to reflect it, or better put, more than the Council allows UNMIK to reflect it.

Today the focus in Kosovo and the Western Balkans is on strengthening regional cooperation, concretizing European integration, increasing academic mobility,

consolidating youth exchanges, enlarging the free trade area and the free movement of goods and persons and deepening interconnectivity. We therefore reiterate our position on the need for a substantial revision of UNMIK's activity and a gradual drawdown of its budget and staff, leading progressively to its closure. Experience has shown that rigid foreign missions, prolonged unnecessarily in fast-changing environments, tend to lose their purpose and relevance. UNMIK cannot stay in Kosovo forever for the very simple reason that no one is able to locate the exit sign, although it is in plain sight.

We strongly encourage both Kosovo and Serbia to continue their efforts and pursue the only path for them and the entire region, which is the European path. That implies working tirelessly to build a better future for the two countries and people, including, in particular, their respective minorities. The Serbs in Kosovo are entitled to the best possible enjoyment of rights in the European landscape. I repeat, the best possible. That should be the same for the Albanian minority in Preševo Valley, in southern Serbia. The passivization of addresses and lack of investment and economic incentives there remain a source of concern.

Let me conclude by highlighting that the developments in our part of the world — the Western Balkans as part of Europe — make it crucial to ensure that minorities are treated with respect and dignity so that they contribute to the well-being of their societies, participate fully in democratic governance and become bridges that connect people and cultures promoting the values of diversity and social progress. That is not only an important lesson from the past but also a powerful path towards our common future.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the presence at today's meeting of His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, and I listened carefully to Special Representative Ziadeh's briefing and Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz's remarks.

China welcomes the two rounds of high-level meetings held recently between the Serbian and Kosovar sides with the facilitation of the European Union (EU), which led to comprehensive and in-depth discussions on a political solution to the Kosovo issue. China has always supported a mutually acceptable solution to the Kosovo issue between the sides concerned, working with each other in the framework

of resolution 1244 (1999) through dialogue and consultation, and encourages continued dialogue and engagement between the two sides. In that process, Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be fully respected. We hope that the existing agreements will be effectively implemented, which will help the two sides to build mutual trust and give momentum to the ongoing dialogue. The establishment of an association of Serbian municipalities is an important component of the 2013 Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, to which the Kosovo authorities have made a clear commitment, and it should be the focus of the next phase of the bilateral dialogue and international good offices. While we recognize the EU's recent efforts in promoting dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, we hope that the EU will remain neutral and impartial in the mediation process and refrain from rushing to achieve quick results, acting hastily or exerting excessive pressure.

China is concerned about the current volatile situation in northern Kosovo. Despite the strong opposition of local Serbs, the Kosovo authorities once again took unilateral action, insisted on holding elections in northern Kosovo and announced the election results despite a turnout of less than 4 per cent, leading to an escalation of local conflicts and regional tensions. China is deeply concerned about that. The recurrence of tensions in northern Kosovo in recent years shows that unilateral actions will only aggravate fears, escalate tensions, undermine peace and stability in the Western Balkans and delay the final settlement of the Kosovo issue, which is in the interests of neither party. China calls on the Kosovo authorities to take the overall situation into account, return to the correct track of dialogue and consultation and refrain from creating artificial conflicts and confrontations. We hope the EU will play a positive and constructive role as a mediator in that regard. Recently, we have seen a continuation of security incidents committed against ethnic minorities in Kosovo, and ethnic relations remain tense. The harmonious coexistence of all ethnic groups is in line with the fundamental interests and development needs of the entire population of Kosovo. China hopes that the Kosovo authorities will take active and strong measures to protect the security and legitimate rights and interests of all the ethnic groups in Kosovo, including the Serbs, and to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents.

Recent developments show that the Kosovo issue is still a security concern for the Balkans and Europe. The Security Council should therefore remain seized of the matter. The role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) remains indispensable in that regard. We hope that, under the leadership of Special Representative Ziadeh, UNMIK will continue to play a constructive role in achieving a political settlement of the Kosovo issue and in maintaining stability and promoting national reconciliation in the country.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Representative Caroline Ziadeh for her informative briefing and her commitment to the implementation of her mandate. I welcome the participation in today's meeting of Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. We listened carefully to the briefing delivered by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz.

The acrimonious dispute over vehicle license plates remains a bone of contention and a source of tension between Belgrade and Pristina. It was at the heart of the mass resignation of thousands of Kosovo Serbs from local institutions, as well as the boycott of the municipal elections held in the north, whose historically low turnout of about 2 per cent demonstrates the extent of the divide between communities. Community life is being seriously undermined by a range of factors, including arbitrary arrests, an increasing number of incidents, shots being fired at police patrols, attacks on journalists, the looting of stores and physical attacks, all of which contribute to a climate of chronic insecurity. It is essential to reach a long-term political solution in order to defuse tensions and ease the political climate.

My country takes note of the European Union's proposal to breathe new life into the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina with a view to normalizing relations. Nevertheless, we remain convinced that the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina must be achieved through the implementation of the 2013 Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. In that context, we welcome and support the various initiatives to accompany Pristina in the implementation of that important agreement. It is also crucial for the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolution 1244 (1999), of 10 June 1999, to be used as key benchmarks in the search for solutions. We must also not lose sight of — and above all, respect

for — the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the principle of respect for the territorial integrity of States.

We note with interest the progress in the facilitation process and call on the parties to remain committed to it and refrain from any unilateral approaches. The community tensions must also be defused and dialogue maintained in order to advance the negotiations in the technical areas that are essential to people's daily lives. We are concerned about the increase in community incidents affecting the religious domain, in particular with respect to the church and religious leaders, and about the minority communities who are targeted by violence, including sexual violence. We hope that the proposed amendments to the criminal code and the criminal procedure code will be sufficiently dissuasive and a deterrent against such despicable acts and their perpetrators. The disproportionate use of force, as well as the recurrent intimidation by special operations units, is unacceptable. We urge the parties to refrain from any unilateral action, including hate speech, which fuels communal tensions. We call on the authorities in Pristina to ensure the safety of all communities and prevent police violence that could reignite tensions. A durable peace can be built only as a result of peaceful cohabitation among the various communities. In that regard, my country stresses the need for expatriates to return and notes with interest the 112 voluntary returns recorded during the reporting period. We encourage continued efforts to return all 200,000 displaced persons.

It is essential for the authorities in Pristina to put in place legal mechanisms to strengthen the rule of law, including through judicial reform, because good justice is essential for building peace. The completion of the draft law on the documentation of crimes committed during the Kosovo war will contribute to bringing about calm.

The remarkable work of the United Nations specialized agencies, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is to be commended for facilitating the voluntary return of members of minority communities and for providing asylum seekers with access to education, public services, legal aid and psychosocial support. The International Organization for Migration's investment in housing to create a friendly living environment among returnees and host communities is also commendable, as are efforts aimed at helping to create small businesses for

demobilized ex-combatants and their families. The European Union's fight against corruption, which is an obstacle to development and peaceful coexistence, is also welcome.

We welcome the increasing number of initiatives by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), including its awareness-raising campaigns against early marriage in Kosovo and its strengthened support for the economic empowerment of young people from minority communities, as well as the organization of seminars and conferences by the United Nations Development Programme, UN-Women and international partners on the involvement and contributions of women in peace processes.

In conclusion, my country reiterates its support for UNMIK in its efforts on the ground and encourages the parties to maintain their dialogue in order to find a political solution through negotiations.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): Let me start by thanking Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her briefing. I welcome the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić, to this meeting. We also took note of the statement by the representative of Kosovo, Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Mozambique welcomes the diplomatic efforts that led to an accord between Belgrade and Pristina on the agreement on a path to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. That important milestone, facilitated by the European Union, is an example of the pivotal role of regional organizations in matters related to international peace and security. The need for stability in Kosovo is important, as it has implications for the wider security landscape of Europe at this challenging time. We strongly urge the national, regional and international parties to carefully consider the impact of their decisions going forward in order to preserve the advances made over the years of efforts towards peace and reconciliation in Kosovo. We urge all the parties to remain committed and consistent in their implementation of resolution 1244 (1999).

Despite the important milestones highlighted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in her briefing, we remain concerned about the continued animosity and tensions between Belgrade and Pristina. The disagreements over freedom of movement and the voting process that took place recently, as well

as the ensuing boycott by Kosovo Serbs of their participation in Kosovo institutions, will undermine the implementation of the European Union's proposal. We strongly urge both the Serbian and Kosovar leaderships to proactively promote reconciliation between their respective communities and to refrain from acts that provoke vandalism and violence. Acts of intercommunal retribution jeopardize the prospects for a long-term settlement of the existing divisions between the two communities. It is important that instances of hate speech, inflammatory rhetoric, misinformation and disinformation, hateful narratives and especially gender-based and sexual violence, including femicide, are unequivocally condemned and those responsible brought to justice.

My country knows from experience that it is not possible to achieve lasting peace without building a more tolerant and inclusive society, based on lessons of the past and a vision for a prosperous future. The inclusion of all stakeholders and main actors — including women, young people and civil society — is extremely important to the successful implementation of the reconciliation process. We therefore commend the efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) aimed at creating common ground, preserving stability, rebuilding trust and improving dialogue among communities and institutions to avoid any relapse into a cycle of conflict.

In conclusion, Mozambique reiterates its support for the work done by UNMIK and applauds the efforts by regional actors, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to mediate conflicts and strengthen Kosovo's institutions.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I am grateful to Special Representative Ziadeh for her briefing and thank Foreign Minister Gërvalla-Schwarz and Foreign Minister Dačić for participating in today's meeting.

The United States remains firmly committed to enhancing stability in the Western Balkans, especially during this time of greater tensions in Europe. We are working closely with our European partners to continue fostering democracy, multi-ethnic societies and the rule of law across the Western Balkans. That is a critically important endeavour, and we will continue to support our partners going forward, including on the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU). We especially appreciate the engagement of EU High

Representative Borrell Fontelles and EU Special Representative Lajčák with Kosovo and Serbia under the EU-facilitated dialogue.

We commend Kosovo and Serbia for taking a crucial step forward with a legally binding agreement reached in Brussels and Ohrid, which is a positive development. We encourage both Kosovo and Serbia to move quickly to implement their respective commitments and to avoid the recurring crises that have hampered progress in the EU-facilitated dialogue for so long. We hope to see more of that new spirit when the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo meet in Brussels on 2 May. A critical part of that important work is further steps by Kosovo to establish an association of Serb majority municipalities in a way that complies with Kosovo's Constitution. The EU-facilitated dialogue, re-energized through the 27 February basic agreement and its implementation annex on 18 March, continues to be the principal mechanism for reconciling issues between the two neighbours.

The positive momentum over the past few months further supports our long-standing view that it is time for the United Nations to find a more relevant role in Kosovo that does not require a Chapter VII mandate. While we greatly appreciate the contributions that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has made to peace and security since it was established in 1999, we should acknowledge that the Mission has long fulfilled its original mandate.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We thank Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her briefing on the situation in the province and for the views she has presented. We welcome the participation in this meeting of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić. We also listened to the views of Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, although she devoted more of her statement to the ties and bilateral relations between Russia and Serbia — which have nothing to do with Pristina — than to Pristina's own legitimate claims, which have been expressed here, and its policies.

I already mentioned this at our previous meeting (see S/PV.9155), but today Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz has once again attempted to pass off the plan of interministerial consultations signed by the Russian and Serbian Foreign

Ministers as Serbia surrendering its sovereignty and putting foreign policy decision-making in Russia's hands. I would say to Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz that that is ridiculous and simply unprofessional. Russia's position on the issue of Kosovo remains unchanged. We are in favour of reaching a sustainable, mutually acceptable international legal solution for Belgrade and Pristina, based on resolution 1244 (1999). The solution must be in the interests of Belgrade and the Serbian people, and it must be endorsed by the Security Council.

The situation in Kosovo is increasingly alarming. Over the past few months, the situation in the province has repeatedly been on the verge of a renewed heated conflict. Pristina, with the support of Western capitals, has not abandoned its attempts to take control of Serb-populated areas. It seems that despite the international community's obsession with human rights, almost no one cares about their observance with respect to the Serbs. As Minister Dačić mentioned earlier, the systematic policy of physically displacing Serbs and transforming the province into an ethnically pure Albanian space continues. I would add that 209,000 of the 372,000 non-Albanians who lived in the province until June 1999 were forced to leave. There are regular incursions by the special forces of the Kosovo police into the northern part of the province. They are building security-agency strongholds on plots of land that were confiscated from non-Albanian locals. Former Serbian members of the Kosovo police are being prosecuted on spurious charges. Orthodox shrines and tombs are being desecrated. Physical attacks against Serbs and their property have increased. Since Albin Kurti came to power in February 2020, more than 300 violent acts against Serbs have been recorded in Kosovo. The perpetrators are generally not prosecuted.

Those are the realities on the ground. But we all understand that without a negotiation process, agreements or adequate mechanisms to ensure the protection of Serbs in the north and the few who remain south of the Ibar River, resolving the current problems will be impossible. In that regard, we must revisit recent history. Ms. Ziadeh already evoked several noteworthy dates today: 19 April marks the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations of 2013, the main provision of which was the establishment of a community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo. But during all the time that has elapsed since then, the Kosovo authorities have avoided its implementation

with impunity. The remaining substantive problems remain unresolved because Pristina — we must be frank— is not interested either in the normalization of relations or the fulfilment of its obligations. That is why Albin Kurti unreasonably demands that the community of Serb municipalities comply with the provincial Constitution and be multi-ethnic without conferring executive powers. Throughout the entire period, the Kosovo Albanians have attempted to substitute what was agreed for the establishment of something akin to a non-governmental organization, which must be rejected. Only a full-fledged community will ensure the basic rights and security of the province's Serbs and the socioeconomic development of the areas they inhabit and preserve their cultural identity. Finally, it would be a prerequisite for achieving lasting and not merely temporary progress towards the settlement of the issue.

In our opinion, it is with an understanding of the true goals of Mr. Kurti's policy that we should approach the 18 March verbal agreements reached between Belgrade and Pristina in Ohrid on two documents — the Agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia and its Implementation Annex. We believe that the optimism expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/247) on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) with regard to the prospects for their implementation is greatly exaggerated. We recall that, as made clear by the many frank statements of the Serbian leadership, Belgrade agreed to continue the dialogue with Pristina on the basis of that understanding and on the condition that its red lines be respected — namely, its non-agreement with the unilateral declaration of independence and Kosovo's membership in the United Nations and the swift establishment of the community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo in accordance with the Brussels Agreement.

On 23 April, Pristina decided to escalate tensions once again by holding so-called municipal elections in northern Kosovo. Despite the refusal of the Serbian majority to propose any candidates, the elections were held nevertheless under pressure from the United States and the European Union. As we know, the Serbs unanimously refused to participate in such a mockery of democratic procedure. However, the paltry 3.5 per cent turnout and the lack of needed resources for holding the elections did not stop Pristina from declaring successful the completely illegitimate elections and announcing

the winners — four Kosovar Albanians who represent a tiny fraction of the local population, 96.5 per cent of whom ignored the farce. The normal electoral process was provocatively replaced by an artificial election process, which was immediately approved by Pristina's Western sponsors. The United States and the European Union have condoned the Kosovars' de facto usurpation of authority in the north of the province and seek to deprive the Serbs of their voice in the face of the terror unleashed against them. In that way, Western countries continue to fuel the conflict between Belgrade and Pristina and continuously exert pressure on the Serbs on all fronts.

For example, at the height of the confrontation in December 2022, the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union accepted Kosovo's application for European candidate status. On 18 April, the European Parliament approved visa liberalization with Kosovo for its citizens, which will enter into force no later than 1 January 2024. The same applies to the immediate review of Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe, which was conducted on April 24. The way that was organized and the manner in which votes were cast in favour of it by certain countries shows better than words can their attitude towards the United Nations and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1244 (1999) providing the framework for the settlement of the Kosovo issue. UNMIK is also under pressure from the Kosovo Albanians — which our Western colleagues would never allow to happen in the context of other peacekeeping operations. We believe that UNMIK must be able to fully carry out its functions and be provided with the necessary human and financial resources to that end. We call for accelerating the investigation into the circumstances of the May 2019 detention of UNMIK staff member Mr. Krasnoshchekov by members of the Kosovo Albanian police and the severe injuries that he suffered as a result. We must once and for all end the recurrence of Pristina's arbitrary treatment of Mission personnel, such as in the case of the Russian citizen Mr. Antonov, who was declared *persona non grata* in December 2021 by an unlawful decision of the regional authorities.

It is obvious that the main goal of the West is to subdue the Balkans by all means possible and draw the countries of the region into one of its military-political blocs. Under such conditions, it is pointless to talk about the sincerity of statements by members of the Quint concerning the stabilization of the region. If it served

their interests, they would have no scruples in setting the region on fire. The increasing activity of NATO attests to that. In violation of resolution 1244 (1999), its members are contributing to the gradual establishment of a virtual Kosovar army by increasing the supply of weapons and military equipment. Washington has essentially privatized the Bondsteel military base, which was created exclusively for peacekeeping purposes. And Washington is doing that shamelessly, as if everyone had forgotten about the so-called Reçak/Račak massacre, which was staged to justify NATO's invasion of Yugoslavia and resulted in the mass bombing of the country with depleted uranium weapons, mass civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. The environment suffered catastrophic damage, as noted in the report on the environmental impact of the war in Yugoslavia on South-East Europe, which was adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in January 2001. The fact is that NATO has never been too concerned about the "collateral damage", as former United States Secretary of State Albright termed it, and that remains the case, as demonstrated by Britain's deliveries of depleted uranium weapons to the Ukrainian regime.

In the light of the 1999 events I just mentioned, we should like to draw attention to the trial of one of the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Hashim Thaçi, and his accomplices, which began at a special court in The Hague in April. We view this as the last chance for restoring justice, albeit 25 years after the inhuman atrocities that were committed. We hope that these criminals will be punished, as they deserve, and the Court in the Hague will not repeat the disastrous mistakes of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

(spoke in English)

I understand that Albania has already spoken the issue that was raised at the beginning of the meeting. As President I would like to make a comment on what has been said today since the way the representative of Albania raised this issue directly or indirectly implicates the presidency and basically accusing it of being partial, that is, of abusing its prerogatives as the presidency.

I would like to clarify this issue. Council members — actually, two Council members — addressed the presidency with the request to allow Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz to speak in Albanian. Today the representative

of Albania invoked rule 44 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure. I will quote the rule for the Council:

"Any representative may make a speech in a language other than the languages of the Security Council. In this case, he shall himself provide for interpretation into one of those languages. Interpretation into the other languages of the Security Council by the interpreters of the Secretariat may be based on the interpretation given in the first such language."

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz does not fall under the category of representative. She speaks under rule 39, not under rule 37, in contrast to Serbia. At 99 per cent of the meetings of the Security Council, briefers and speakers are invited under rule 39, and none of them insist on speaking his or her own language if different from one of the six official languages of the United Nations. We thought it should not be otherwise at this meeting, and this has nothing to do with discrimination against the Albanian language. I have already referred to precedents where there were statements under rule 39 in native languages, but these exceptions were made for those speakers who did not speak any of the six official United Nations languages.

Had that been the case with Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz, we would have treated the situation in the same way: she would have been granted an opportunity to speak Albanian. But we all witnessed today that she masters English more than decently, and we did not object, as the representative of Albania claimed today, but consulted with the Member States through the political coordinators network. The result of these consultations was the communication of one State member of the Council to the Secretariat of the decision — I emphasize, decision — by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz to address the Council in English. The same message was communicated to the Russian presidency. In the message to the Secretariat, that same Council member underlined that if the request to speak Albanian reaches the Secretariat before the communication that Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz had decided to speak English, the formal request should be disregarded. We therefore reject any attempts to accuse the presidency of non-impartiality. We are conducting our duties in good faith.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): As long as we are on this issue of the language, I just want to state for the record that my understanding of this

language issue, as raised first by the Foreign Minister of Kosovo, then the presidency and then the Permanent Representative of Albania, coincides 100 per cent with the explanation provided by the Permanent Representative of Albania. I thank the presidency for its further explanation of this issue, but I believe that the explanation provided by Albania stands.

The President: We note the position of the United States. We already stated how we see the matter and how things developed and are developing in the course of discussion of that issue.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Dačić (Serbia) (*spoke in Serbian; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): I do not know why we are having a language problem. We never had problems like this before; I do remember that Hashim Thaçi and others speaking in Albanian in this Chamber on previous occasions, so I hardly think that there was anything wrong in this. On the other hand, Council members have heard what Citizen Gërvalla said, so they have a first-hand idea of what the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristine looks like, in particular in terms of the degree of extremism it entails. From this, it is clear to see that Kosovo does not actually want a dialogue. Kosovo wants to see war and conflict continue. Members should take note of Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz's racism towards Serbian DNA in her statements. Colleagues in her Ministry have accused her of promoting segregation by nationality.

I was born in Kosovo, while Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz was born in Skopje, in northern Macedonia. She therefore has no lessons to teach me on the history of Kosovo. As I mentioned previously, it is abundantly clear that Kosovo is not interested in dialogue. Let me quote a statement by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz from 1998:

“The Albanian people thought wrong when they believed that the Americans would bring them freedom and that [the Albanian people] should be prepared for the Kosovo issue to be resolved through war”.

That was her statement before the NATO aggression in 1999.

When we speak of Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz's father, whom she did not mention today, I wish to say generally and absolutely that Serbia had nothing to do

with Federal State Security Services from 1988, while those services were staffed with Slovenians, Croats and others. Citizen Gërvalla has actually accused some members of the Kosovo parties in power of having worked for Serbian and Yugoslav security forces. When it comes to the reasons why her father had the kind of political positions he had, I would remind her that, in 1982, long before Milosević, Dačić and Vučić, he, like other Albanians, was a separatist and was advocating an independent Kosovo.

What, then, are we talking about? Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz has shown that her policy for decades has been an independent Kosovo, and if it can be done through Americans, French, Germans, so much the better, but, if it has to be done through war or conflict, so be it, because her friends will accept it in the end. Since she has invited the Kosovo issue to be resolved through armed conflict, her hands are bloody.

In 2017, she said that she will send evidence of crimes committed by Hashim Thaçi and Kadri Veseli against her political opponents, and they say that she has done so, which is why she has security with her all the time. I would like to remind the Council that, 10 years ago, I signed the Brussels Agreement, together with Hashim Thaçi and Catherine Ashton. I am here. Where is Hashim Thaçi? Why was I or President Vučić not accused of being responsible for something? It is because we have not taken part in anything, while she has. I thank her for helping to accuse Mr. Thaçi and Mr. Veseli for war crimes, because I am certain that they helped her gather the testimonies from the victims' families.

When she talks about genocide, one side, which is accused of committing genocide, has endured great sacrifices and has victims. I told her that there were 40,000 Serbs living in Pristina in the 1990s. Where are those Serbs? Today there are only 100 or a couple of hundred. Kosovo used to have 10,000 Serbs in prison. Now it has only 25 or 23. If genocide is being committed against it, which she claims, the numbers should be reversed. What is she talking about?

Every metre of Kosovo land has been covered in Serbian blood for centuries. She is talking about bloody battles, including the Kosovo battle, which she did not witness. That battle happened 500 years ago and took place between Serbs and Turks, because Albanians did not live there. In any case, resolutions 1160 (1998), 1203 (1998) and 1199 (1998) refer to the representatives of Kosovo security forces as terrorist forces.

She is talking about the alliance of her foreign policy with that of the European Union. That is very interesting. With what foreign policy did Kosovo align its decision to open an embassy in Jerusalem? Was that in accordance with the policy of the European Union? Was that in accordance with the position of the General Assembly or was that necessary for Kosovo in order for Israel to recognize its independence? Do not be ridiculous. We are small, but we are not stupid.

She is talking about principles and about Ukraine. Ukraine does not recognize Kosovo. She is talking about our alliance with Russia and Albania. We have the Open Balkan Initiative. Does the fact that we have deals with Russia mean that Albania and North Macedonia have deals with Russia too? I know that she has lectured them on entering the Open Balkan Initiative. She is talking about the boycotts of the elections. The people of Kosovo have boycotted elections in Serbia for many years. She can tell that to those who do not know. This is theatre of the absurd. Had Kosovo been hers, she would have an Albanian word for Kosovo and she would not be using the Serbian word Kosovo.

When it comes to crimes, I do not want to remind her that the families in Staro Gracko killed people, including children. Near Klečka 1,300 people were kidnapped, and there were rapes. That was recorded by the consultative bodies of UNMIK. I do not approve of any crimes towards Albanians or Serbs, but I kindly ask her that, when we talk about this, we not have a selective approach. Each war criminal must be brought to justice. Selective and double standards lead us to discussing crimes which were allegedly committed only against Albanians and certain statements of the citizen Gërvalla will become part of the history. I think Orwell would envy her statements.

Many Council members think that this is perhaps like a hidden camera or a joke, so I kindly ask them to write it down as a reminder of something very hypocritical. Kosovo is the most democratic country in the Balkans. She is not only offending Serbs and others. Does she know how many other countries there are in the Balkans, if Kosovo could even be considered a country? Kosovo is the most democratic country in the Balkans. Kosovo is a guarantor of freedom and peace in the Balkans. Yes, that is something it has been for centuries when, in the First World War, it fought against Americans, French and the British and, in the Second World War, it fought on the side of Hitler, the SS Skanderbeg and so on. Kosovo was definitely always on the right side of freedom and a guarantor of stability.

And then citizen Gërvalla says that when Kosovo promises something, it keeps its word. That is like a tragic comedy. Security Council members should refer to Council records from 10 years ago. In the presence of Hillary Clinton and with the support of Angela Merkel, Hashim Thaçi, Catherine Ashton and I signed the Brussels Agreement. Gërvalla says that if something is not being fulfilled, then it is a farce and a lie. That is where she is right. This is a farce. Kosovo's failure to form the association of Serb-majority municipalities has been tolerated for 10 years. I did not think of that; it was the request of the international community. Now she is saying that Mr. Vučić, Mr. Dačić and she have discussed that so many times. I think she probably just rewrote her statement from the last meeting (see S/PV.9155) and added me to it, as I was not that interesting to her when she participated in the meeting last time.

When it comes to us, we fulfilled all our international obligations, and international capitals knows that. She talks about the visits of the international community to Pristina. They came to pressure her to form the association of Serb-majority municipalities, not because she is an example of democracy.

She talks about military exercises. Since 2021, we have had only four with Russia and Belarus, while we had five or six with the United States and she knows that. What is she — more Catholic than the Pope?

She refers to the Serbian people, the Serbian World and Greater Serbia, but as far as I know, Kosovo has the day of the Albanian flag on 28 November. The list during the elections she represented did not recognize the flags of Kosovo. She received international representatives under the Albanian flag. Do you think the representatives at this meeting do not know that her political programme consists of uniting with Albania? Albin Kurti said several years ago that Kosovo sought independence from Serbia, but not from Albania. She is now talking about the great Serbian world while she calls for all Albanians to unite. That is something her father advocated back in 1982. Was Vučić, Milošević or Dačić in power then? No, it was Josip Broz Tito, whom she allegedly liked and supported in her youth. And now she is complaining about Yugoslavian security forces. She hates Serbia, and it is very hypocritical, but if she could use it, then she has no problem with it.

Here I have a list of employees of the United Nations, not counting the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo — 240 people

employed by the United Nations, and after each of their names, it says Serbia. But 123 of them are actually Serbs, whereas 105 of them are Albanians. Is she not embarrassed by this? She is spitting on Serbia, but she has no problem with taking a couple of thousand dollars on our account. Eighteen of them are in P- and D-level positions. She knows the level of importance of those posts and the highest position that Serbia reaches in the United Nations. She, who does not recognize Serbia, is from independent Kosovo, but here in the United Nations, she works under a Serbian passport. Is she not embarrassed? If she refuses it, then she should maybe give it up. She should say that she despises Serbia, that Serbia is disgusting and a genocidal country.

I am the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and she has greatly offended me. Yet, her colleagues and people have Serbia written in their passport. I am certain that she has seen them here. Perhaps one of them is here listening to this. I did not think it would be correct. I do not know whether they recognize Serbia or not or under which principles those people are representatives of Serbia in the United Nations.

To cut it short, she can say whatever she likes. She can lie, but she has to understand that we are different and that we have our differences on the issue of status of Kosovo. We do not consider Kosovo to be a State, but she does. She has her approach, and we have our own approach. Each country has its own Kosovo. That is why each country is wondering how we should approach solving this issue. We think that Kosovo is Serbia. She does not agree. Should we lead a war?

I kindly ask her to align her approach to the political will expressed by everyone in order for dialogue to succeed. When it comes to the red lines President Vučić mentioned, I want everyone to know that Vučić never signed an agreement, because for us *de facto* or *de jure* recognition of Kosovo their membership in the United Nations are unacceptable. We have verbally agreed to the implementation of something, but the first condition of the implementation of any part of these agreements is the formation of the association of Serb municipalities, and we will see what will actually happen in that regard.

She does not want peace. She is full of hatred, and she wants war. We are not afraid of her, but the international community should be afraid of her. That is what Mr. Escobar says when he comes, that the association of Serb municipalities has to be formed — with Kurti or without him. I say this since she talked about this and about Aleksandar Vučić and I.

I am here for the twenty-fifth time at a Security Council meeting. From the way she speaks and thinks that a President could go against the will of the international community tells me that she probably will not remain in her position for long, but that is her problem. We do want to dialogue, but we do not want for someone not to fulfil their obligation while being rewarded for not doing so, which is the case with Pristina.

We could probably have long discussions over many days. Regardless of our political differences and our different political views, we have no reason not to talk. Of course we have to talk. But if we hope for success, we have to have good political will, and I am not certain that we do. Actually, I am certain that this is not the case with the representatives of the Pristina Administration, headed by Kurti.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz: Mr. Dačić has just shown today why people in Serbia in the 1990s called him “little Sloba”, which means little Slobodan Milošević, after his boss and hero. I do understand that he is angry, and I know this language. I have known it for a long time because it have spent more than just two, three or four years in European politics.

But he needs to explain to his people at home what he has done and how, in 1999, he lost Kosovo forever, instead of using that old rhetoric from the 1980s and the 1990s. I think that people in Serbia do not deserve that. I know that the truth hurts. He can take citations from the year 1000 or 1500. But the truth hurts. I am very sorry for him because he is our neighbour, and we need to deal with him.

Talking about my father makes it even clearer how Mr. Dačić personally thinks. My father, who was a writer and journalist, was murdered — assassinated by the Serbian-dominated UDBA. And this is a fact. There are facts and there are lies. The fact is that the former UDBA was a Serbia-dominated secret service that assassinated my father because he wanted the independence of Kosovo. The independence of Kosovo is so difficult for Mr. Dačić to accept that he would rather accept the assassination of a journalist for wanting to peacefully get through his written text on the independence of Kosovo.

This shows that Mr. Dačić is old Serbia, not new Serbia. He is Milošević Serbia. And it is the other Serbia that the Europe and the region needs. So with him, Serbia knows that there is no way to Europe or to a better future for his citizens. If he tries to put me in connection with the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, let me just tell him that it is different from anything in Serbia. He is talking about the special court set up by the Kosovo Parliament — because we are not the Serbia of Dačić, Vučić and Milošević. It was a sovereign and independent decision to investigate possible crimes and offences committed between 1998 and 2000. In that regard, it is important to acknowledge the heroic efforts of the people of Kosovo, who saved tens of thousands of lives from the merciless Serbian war machine. He was part of that. Our Government, our State and our citizens acknowledge the brave efforts and adore the brave Kosovo Liberation Army, which took a stand against genocide. The terrorists were the ones who burned down villages, slaughtered thousands of people, from babies to the elderly, and brutally raped women and girls. They denied everything and even celebrated it; they celebrated genocide. And he was in the middle of them. People cannot sink lower than that, whether in Serbia, Russia or elsewhere.

The people of Kosovo who defended their families, villages and fellow citizens were not the terrorists. It was the Serbian forces who were the terrorists, sponsored by their State. Unfortunately, the United Nations blockade imposed by Russia hindered their defeat. But it was only through the courage and civility of United Nations Members, as well as the bravery of our own men and women, that we were able to prevail.

It is true that at the moment President Thaçi is at The Hague, where I strongly believe that he will show that the Kosovo Liberation Army, himself and others who are being accused have all the arguments on their side to show that they are innocent of the accusations. What Mr. Dačić said about me being a witness at The Hague merits no comment. It is simply not true. He would be well advised to read a little deeper than just the headlines; it really would be very worthwhile.

Kosovo is today an independent State. It is a sovereign, democratic State — one of the six countries in the Western Balkans. That means that, as a sovereign, democratic State, we are discussing with a very problematic neighbour the normalization of our relations. It is not a dialogue about the status of Kosovo, because that is a done deal recognized by

more than 115 Members of the United Nations. But it is a discussion — negotiations — in Brussels about the status and normalization of our relations. We made progress last month where we thought that Serbia had committed to and accepted the European proposal, which has the support of the European Union and the United States.

Hearing Mr. Dačić today, and in recent days his President, I sincerely wonder whether we really had an agreement at Ohrid or not. As we understand it, we have an agreement and will be very committed to implement what we promised to do at the two meetings, in Brussels and Ohrid. Meanwhile, I have doubts in hearing all those statements, which are made more for domestic public consumption than for this body. But it is as it is. We cannot choose our neighbours. We will continue the discussions. Whether with the current Serbian political elite or with others, we will normalize our relationship — because there is no other alternative.

To conclude, I understand the frustration. I understand all the efforts to use history to excuse genocide. But as a true European, I am not ready to accept any of these backward-looking arguments. I hope that in Belgrade and the Serbian Government reasonable people will prevail and find a way to deal with people like Mr. Dačić and Mr. Vučić, who represent Serbia's past and not its future.

I could continue into the night discussing Mr. Dačić's lies, but I want to spare this body this kind of discussion. And so that is all I have to say.

The President: We cannot continue into the night. We have other plans in the Security Council in the very near future.

The representative of Albania has asked for the floor to make a further statement. As this is starting to resemble an open debate, I will draw the line here on representatives asking for the floor and will end the meeting after he speaks.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I am absolutely aware of the time. This is not to reply to anything that was said, but just to make one comment.

What we heard — and it has happened many times — shows how difficult the discussion on some topics can be. But I regret that we do not see in the Council the spirit we see in Brussels, where the parties meet. It is not always an easy discussion, but they agree. What happened on 18 March is absolutely a milestone. I

think we should really strive to bring to the Council the spirit of what is happening and not really argue about the historical perspectives, about which we disagree. Nobody forgets that, but I think we have to look forward. What happens between Kosovo and Serbia is extremely important for Kosovo and Serbia, but it is important for other countries in the region as well. That is why we want that to succeed. That is why we want such agreements. That is why we want implementation. But in order to avoid the Council having the opposite

effect of what happens in Brussels, I reiterate what we have said before, that is, that we do not need two annual meetings. Just one per year is probably enough.

The President: Let the spirit prevail. The question is, what spirit?

As I announced, I drew a line. There are no more speakers on my list. I am sorry to anybody who wanted to request the floor, but we really have run out of time.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.