

**Statement by
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Nikola Selakovic
at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the report on the work of UNMIK
13 April 2021**

Distinguished President of the Security Council,

Distinguished Special Representative,

Esteemed members of the Security Council,

At the outset, I have no choice but to lodge a protest against the abuse of the video format of this session on the part of the representatives of Pristina in order to promote the symbols of the so-called statehood of Kosovo. Despite the fact that the representatives of Pristina were warned on several occasions, including by the President of the Security Council at the previous session, that such abuses of Security Council sessions are absolutely unacceptable and constitute a flagrant violation of the Security Council rules on participation of representatives of the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina, under Rule 39 of the UN Security Council Rules of Procedure, we are again faced with their reckless disregard for the rules of this distinguished body. Let me reiterate our call for the necessary steps to be taken to prevent such abuses.

It is my great pleasure to address this august body at the meeting on the work of the Mission of the United Nations in Kosovo and Metohija. At the outset, I would like to thank Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Guterres and Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIK Mr. Tanin for the report submitted and for their efforts made towards the implementation of the UNMIK mandate, and also to the members of the Security Council for the continued attention they have devoted to the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. The Republic of Serbia highly values the activities of the Mission of the United Nations in Kosovo and Metohija and supports it in carrying out its work as efficiently as possible and undiminished in scope, aiming to build and preserve security in the Province.

Mr. President,

In the previous period we have faced political instability in Kosovo and Metohija. We recently had elections in the Province, which unfortunately confirmed that political extremism among Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija is not decreasing, but on the contrary, is becoming stronger. We have witnessed Albanian leaders competing among themselves in efforts to find the best way to provoke an incident in Serb communities, in order to score political points of the Albanian electorate. During the election campaign, a large number of offensive and threatening graffiti appeared in Serb communities, Albanian politicians visited Serbian towns and villages unannounced in the company of armed persons with terrorist KLA insignia, while also installing election campaign billboards on the edges of Serb-majority settlements showing emblems of the terrorist KLA as well billboards with the image of Ramush Haradinaj, one of its former commanders. The provisional institutions in Pristina went a step further in exerting institutional pressures on the Serbian people in the province. From the very beginning of the election process they endeavoured to diminish the support enjoyed by the Serb List in Kosovo and Metohija, by resorting to a series of irregularities such as arbitrarily deleting voters from the voter list, changing voters' polling stations, creating polling boards while disregarding the ethnic structure of the population, etc. Under the pretext of amending the voter list, a large number of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija were deprived of one of their fundamental political rights - the opportunity to elect their political representatives. Out of approximately 140,000 of citizens of Kosovo and Metohija who were removed from the voter list in the latest election process, 85% are Serbs.

Despite numerous challenges and problems, the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija have shown, by high turnout and a convincing victory of the Serb List which won all ten seats reserved for Serbian representatives, that nothing can stop them from resolutely defending their position. Political pressures on Serbs continued even after the election process was completed, by denying Serbs fair representation in provisional institutions as the new so-called government in Pristina decided to assign only one ministry to the Serb community.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

Unfortunately, it was not only during the election activities that we witnessed the unreasonable anti-Serb policy being pursued by the provisional institutions in Pristina. This goes to the length of breaking into the Health Center in Strpce, in the south of Kosovo and Metohija, by police inspectors and officers from Pristina, in January this year, who conducted a search aiming to discover Covid-19 vaccines there, originating from central Serbia, which they did not find. In doing so they demonstrated force and threatened to arrest the director of the Health Center, medical staff and doctors. At a time when the whole world is fighting the pandemic with vaccines being the only way to end this challenge, while Serbia is showing support and solidarity by donating vaccines and medical equipment to all in need in the region, Pristina wants to destroy vaccines only because they originate from central Serbia. As the whole world expresses gratitude to medical doctors, who have made great and heroic sacrifices in combating the virus, the provisional institutions in Pristina are attacking Serbian doctors for doing their job.

Although we believe that intrusions into health care institutions are inadmissible, our reaction was restrained this time as well. We did not want our decisions to cause escalation and politicization of activities that are solely aimed at protecting public health. We organized the vaccination of citizens from Kosovo and Metohija at three locations in central Serbia and thus clearly demonstrated that people's lives are the top priority to us. Serbia continues to be ready to help all in need of assistance, and we call for reason and responsibility, especially in such difficult times.

Mr. President,

This is not the first time that the Serbian health care system in Kosovo and Metohija and our health workers there are targeted by Pristina and extremists. Symbols of the terrorist KLA are being graffitied on health institutions, outpatient care facilities are being stoned and broken into. The latest attack took place the previous weekend in the village of Gojbulja, where an outpatient care facility was broken into. Attacks targeting Serbs and their property have been on the rise. In the last year alone, more than 80 attacks and incidents took place in our southern province, targeting Serbs, their property and religious sites. According to the information provided by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and Metohija, in the second half of last year, the number of incidents increased by more than 30% compared to 2019. Therefore, we cannot agree with the assessment that the "security situation in Kosovo remained stable, with a few incidents reported affecting non-majority communities". Last weekend, for example, an entirely unprovoked physical attack by a group of Albanians on two Serb young men took place in the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica.

Serb returnees represent a particularly vulnerable category, who spend their every day in fear of being attacked. The fact that one family of returnees was the target of seven attacks clearly indicates the persistence of those who do not want Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, in attempts to intimidate and expel the already small number of returnees. There is absolutely no trace of political will in Pristina for more than 200,000 displaced Serbs who have been living outside Kosovo and Metohija for 22 years to return to their homes. To be very specific, 212,995 persons are still temporarily housed in central Serbia or Serb-majority

municipalities in the north of the province. I remind you that the southern Serbian province is still an area with the lowest return rate of displaced persons in the world. Since 1999, the rate of sustainable return of internally displaced persons in Kosovo and Metohija has been only 1.9%, which according to the UN data is officially the lowest percentage of return of expelled population after a conflict anywhere in the world.

One of the methods used to discourage returnees has involved the continuous and systematic destruction of the economic basis for sustainable return. Pressures on business entities in Serb-majority communities in Kosovo and Metohija, south of the Ibar river, have continued through the so-called Privatization Agency of Kosovo. The abuse of legally unfounded procedures is destroying the economy, the liquidated property is being sold to Albanian businessmen, which is why the Serb population from these municipalities loses jobs and income. Internally displaced persons and returnees have continuously been targets of political rigged trials and unwarranted arrests. There have been many such examples in the previous period, and the abuse of war crimes indictments is especially problematic. It is often the case that indictments are raised against Serb returnees at a time when they return to renovated homes, or when they refuse to sell their property under pressure.

At the same time, while arresting internally displaced persons, Pristina authorities are exerting the strongest of pressures on the Specialist Chambers in The Hague. The aim is to completely prevent the further processing of a number of cases against members of the terrorist KLA, on charges of serious crimes committed during the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija against both Serbs and persons belonging to other nationalities. President of the Specialist Chambers Madam Trendafilova recently warned that, should the pressures continue, this would have very dramatic consequences to the trials in progress. President Trendafilova underlined as highly problematic the phenomenon of witness intimidation, who are key for conducting proceedings successfully and rendering a proper verdict.

Although the wait to raise indictments was far too long, we consider it commendable that efforts have finally been made to punish the perpetrators of numerous serious crimes which were committed during the armed conflicts a little over two decades ago, but also upon the arrival of the international forces to Kosovo and Metohija. For example, no one has been held accountable to this day for the killings and abductions of 17 journalists during the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija, which is currently the largest number of unsolved cases of murdered and kidnapped journalists in Europe. Furthermore, the perpetrators of any of the mass crimes committed against Serb civilians after 1999 have not been brought to justice. I will remind you of only a few of these cases: 14 Serb farmers were killed in the village of Staro Gracko, 12 displaced Serbs were killed and 43 wounded in the attack on the "Niš Express" bus in Livadice near Podujevo, and in Gorazdevac near Pec unknown persons fired automatic weapons on children who were swimming in the Bistrica river. Two Serb children were killed then, and four were seriously injured.

We hope that relevant international actors will continue to support the Specialist Chambers in The Hague, and that special attention will be focused on witness protection.

We expect the EULEX Mission to continue to support the Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office, as well as its additional engagement in the field of the rule of law. Special attention needs to be devoted to witness protection, and determining the fate of missing persons. Numerous tasks set before this Mission, including those related to the implementation of what was agreed in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, clearly indicate that the functioning of EULEX in the existing framework must not be called into question. We expect the European Union to decide to extend its mandate in the period ahead as well.

International missions in Kosovo and Metohija - UNMIK, KFOR EULEX and OMIK are an integral part of the international civilian and security presence in our southern province, under the administration

of the United Nations and in line with UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999), and play a key role and make an outstanding contribution to the preservation of peace and protection of the population. We support and respect their engagement and efforts made in the framework of their mandates, with the common goal of creating conditions for a peaceful and safe coexistence of the inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija. The Serb and other non-Albanian population in Kosovo and Metohija have the utmost confidence in the international presence and consider it a guarantor of security and a barrier against the arbitrariness of the provisional institutions in Pristina. This further demonstrates the need that international missions remain engaged in an undiminished scope, in order to consistently implement UNSC Resolution 1244.

I would like to further emphasize the importance of KFOR international forces and point out that any unilateral attempt to assign to someone else or that someone else assumes a part of KFOR's mandate and responsibilities constitutes a violation of the UNSC Resolution 1244, while also being a potential source of instability and tensions. I will remind you that Pristina, contrary to international law and completely ignoring the interests and positions of the Serb community in the Province, would not abandon its plans to install a new security actor in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. We consider the unilateral decisions on the formation of the "Ministry of Defence" and launching the process of transforming the so-called "Kosovo Security Forces" (KSF) into the so-called "Kosovo Army" to be unacceptable. I would like to reiterate that such unilateral moves on the part of Pristina constitute a gross violation of the UNSC Resolution 1244 and the Military Technical Agreement, according to which only the International Security Forces, that is KFOR, have the mandate for all military aspects of security in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

In this context, an additional reason for concern is the announcement of the construction of the largest base of the "Kosovo Security Forces" in the southern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, which Serbs in the north of Kosovo and Metohija perceive as the most open provocation and threat to their physical safety.

We also express serious concern about the announced participation of members of the so-called "Kosovo Security Forces" at the multinational military exercise "Immediate Response 21", which is planned to be held from 17 May to 2 June this year, organized by the US Armed Forces. Further concerns are raised by the fact that a part of the "Immediate Response 21" military exercise is planned to be held on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, outside the framework of the engagement of KFOR. This is the first time that military forces that are not part of KFOR are deployed on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. I would like to warn that Pristina's unilateral moves in the process of militarization of the so-called "Kosovo Security Forces" represent a threat to stability and maintenance of peace in the entire region.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

It is particularly worrying for the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija that in the previous period, and especially in March this year, there were frequent physical attacks on the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In just two weeks, as many as seven Orthodox landmarks in the province were targeted by vandals, at a time when we all remember the March 2004 pogrom against Serbs and Serbian holy sites in Kosovo and Metohija. The condition of the Serbian cultural and spiritual heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is humiliating, including the four monuments that are inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger (Visoki Decani, Holy Virgin of Ljevisa, Gračanica and the Patriarchate of Pec). Numerous administrative and technical barriers are imposed on priestly and monastic communities, which makes it more difficult or even impossible for them to survive on church property.

A striking example of the disrespectful attitude towards Serbian cultural and religious monuments in the Province, whose exceptional universal value UNESCO confirmed by inscribing them on the World Heritage List, is the case of the Visoki Decani Monastery.

When it comes to the Visoki Decani Monastery, we remind you once again that the Monastery of Visoki Decani is the most frequently attacked cultural heritage site in Kosovo and Metohija. This was the first monument in Kosovo and Metohija to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The monastery was a target of armed attacks as many as four times: two mortar attacks were carried out in 2000, eight mortar shells were fired at the monastery during the March 2004 pogrom, and another mortar attack took place in 2007 resulting in a court verdict. In addition, ISIS graffiti appeared on the walls of the monastery in 2014, while four armed Albanians were arrested in front of the monastery in 2016 and, as it turned out, two of those arrested had been blacklisted as ISIS sympathizers. This Serbian monastery is under physical protection of KFOR soldiers due to being endangered. I will also remind you of the problem with the construction project for a Decani-Plav main road within the protected zone around the monastery, which dramatically endangers its integrity and authenticity, and which was only addressed upon being pressured by the international community. Furthermore, the monastery is still unable to register more than 24 hectares of land in its possession, despite the existence of a final and executive decision, which is a drastic violation of international standards. For this reason, the "Europa Nostra" organization had every right when it included Decani last week on the list of the seven most endangered cultural and historical monuments in Europe. Instead of solving the problem of Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija being endangered, which is also a valuable part of the European Christian heritage, Pristina reacted by denying the problem and claiming that self-proclaimed Kosovo is an oasis of religious tolerance and multiculturalism. Through such an approach of Pristina, the Serbian cultural heritage is only further threatened. The whole case became completely absurd when a non-governmental organization which refers to itself as the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, and which happens to be close to political structures in Pristina, last weekend requested that an investigation be launched against the Abbot of the monastery, Sava Janjic, for war crimes.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

The reason for the nervous behaviour of Pristina is all too obvious, as the project of the so-called independence today fails to be recognized by more than a half of the United Nations Member States, including five members of the European Union. However, it is high time for Albanian leaders in Kosovo and Metohija to show responsibility in fulfilling their commitments, but also a sincere commitment to reaching a compromise solution and building mutual trust. The lack of trust is one of the fundamental problems in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. An agreement is not reached through inflammatory rhetoric and provocations, such as the announcements of unification and creation of a greater Albania or plans to build the largest base of the so-called Kosovo Security Forces in the north of the Province.

I will remind you that the current Prime Minister of the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina, Albin Kurti, has repeatedly threatened to unite the self-proclaimed Kosovo and Albania in the past. A member of Kurti's Self-Determination Party, Fidan Ademi, publicly said last weekend that the self-proclaimed Kosovo and Albania would be united, I quote, "with rifle and gunpowder, or referendum boxes".

I need not explain why such dangerous ideas constitute a direct threat to peace and stability. They violate Resolution 1244, while continuously destabilizing not only our southern province, but the entire region as well, and in no way contribute to the dialogue process, but instead hamper it again.

We have demonstrated time and time again our commitment to dialogue as the only way towards a peaceful, political solution to the problem in Kosovo and Metohija. Even today, after many years of negotiations, but also failure to fulfill what was agreed and constant unilateral moves and provocations on the part of the provisional institutions in Pristina, we are still ready to sit down at the table and talk.

We are ready for dialogue but not to be blackmailed and threatened and especially not for ultimatums recently presented by Albin Kurti. I will remind you of his statement that the dialogue will be low on the list of priorities of the Pristina authorities, only to recently hear him speak about the so-called four principles that the dialogue should be based on, in his opinion. It is bewildering how Pristina refers to ultimatums completely undermining any chance of dialogue, as the European Union also pointed out, as "principles" and how it persistently insists that Belgrade should recognize the unilaterally declared independence of "Kosovo", upon which, they believe, all else would be resolved. What is the purpose of the dialogue then, if Belgrade is only expected to recognize the so-called Kosovo? Does the dialogue imply that one side should give up everything only for the other to win it all? And does the dialogue, in Pristina's opinion, imply that what was agreed should not be fulfilled?

I will remind you that Pristina still refuses to follow up on its obligations arising from the agreements reached so far and does not agree to discuss their implementation within the dialogue. And the situation is quite simple - in April 2013, the first agreement was signed in Brussels, which envisaged four obligations: one for Pristina and three for Belgrade. Belgrade has fulfilled all obligations, while the only obligation that the provisional institutions in Pristina had - to form the Community of Serb Municipalities - has remained unfulfilled for 2,917 days now. In fact, 19 April marks eight full years since the agreement was reached in Brussels, and of Pristina's failure to fulfill the obligation to form the Community of Serb Municipalities.

There are also problems in the implementation of those agreements that Pristina does not nominally dispute. Pristina substantially violates or obstructs almost all these agreements, and problems have been most notable in the fields of energy, judiciary, freedom of movement and visits of officials. For example, in the energy sector, the provisional institutions in Pristina have registered their transmission system operator "KOSTT", thus realizing all their interests from the Energy Agreement reached within the dialogue, but on the other hand they have not previously fulfilled their part of the obligations under those agreements, and to this day they are preventing the establishment and licensing of Serbian energy companies, which according to the agreements should carry out these activities in the north of Kosovo and Metohija.

The arbitrariness that Pristina is demonstrating in connection with the implementation of the agreement on the freedom of movement is especially absurd and makes no exception even when it comes to officials or other persons from central Serbia, whether they are pilgrims, internally displaced persons, athletes or journalists. We recall that the provisional institutions in Pristina recently prevented the journalist team of the Radio Television of Serbia from entering Kosovo and Metohija, to which Special Representative Tanin reacted, pointing out the importance of media freedom, the right to information and freedom of movement. However, Pristina continues to breach the agreements, careless that such actions heavily violate the international standards regarding the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Distinguished Mr. President,

Regardless of the discouraging messages heard from Pristina and the fact that the dialogue has been in progress for many years, Serbia is determined and will not give up on identifying a compromise solution, which will be sustainable for future generations as well. Lasting peace and stability can only be achieved if none of the participants in the dialogue pursues maximalist demands and insists on the complete humiliation of the other. The Serbian and Albanian peoples, as the two most numerous peoples in the Western Balkans, need to find a way to reach reconciliation and a basis for cooperation, both in terms of the economy and in achieving shared prospects for membership -to the European Union.

Belgrade has made sincere steps in that direction, by being one of the initiators of the idea of relaxing the flow of people, goods, capital and services, popularly referred to as "mini-Schengen". However, even though this idea is supported by both Albania and North Macedonia, Pristina has so far shown no willingness to work on thawing the political atmosphere through regional economic initiatives. Quite the opposite, Pristina has violated the CEFTA agreement whenever the opportunity arose. I must state with concern that political forces are in power in Pristina today, whose activists in the recent past physically hijacked and overturned trucks with goods originating from central Serbia. That is why I have very serious reasons to doubt the interpretations according to which Self-Determination is a force that will democratically revive the society in Kosovo and Metohija and contribute to post-conflict reconciliation and cooperation.

As far as Serbia is concerned, we are convinced that the only way to build lasting peace and stability in our region is by working to build trust and insisting on positive political agendas. The inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija, of any nationality, whether they are Serbs or Albanians, do not deserve anything less.

Thank you for your attention.