

***Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić
at the UN Security Council session on the United Nations Mission in Kosovo
(UNMIK),
21 October 2020***

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I would like to thank Secretary-General Guterres and Special Representative Tanin for delivering the report and their efforts made in carrying out the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999). The presence of the UN Mission in Kosovo and Metohija, undiminished in scope, is of huge importance to building lasting peace, stability and security in the Province.

Serbia has been taking a very serious and responsible approach to the dialogue with Pristina, which has lasted for almost a decade. I would like to point to the problems that we have been facing since its beginning, and which persists to this day. Let me remind you that more than seven years ago in Brussels, along with Hashim Thaci, I signed the Brussels Agreement following difficult negotiations and major concessions on our part. The guarantor of the agreement was none other than the European Union, i.e., its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at the time, Ms. Catherine Ashton. I already raised this issue in this august body – not only that Pristina misled Serbia, but it also misled the European Union as the guarantor of the agreement by refusing to implement it, despite having signed it, and form the Community of Serb Municipalities, with an excuse that it was contrary to the so-called Kosovo constitution.

For years we kept asking the European Union the same question, the question I repeated in this chamber time and again – whether something we discuss, agree and sign can be called a dialogue and agreement if one side says “we shall not implement what we

agreed on”. I ask the same question again today – what would happen if Serbia decided not to deliver on its commitments? Would you have the patience, understanding and excuses for us as well the way you did for Pristina for more than seven years? And yet, Serbia has patiently demonstrated commitment to dialogue and implementation of what was agreed, in the hope that others will realize how the process as a whole was damaged by such unacceptable conduct of Pristina. We have been encouraged that last week, on his visit to Pristina, Special Representative Lajčák insisted on the full implementation of the agreements reached. The negative reaction of Pristina to his statements, however, indicates that they still lack the political will necessary for substantial progress in the dialogue process.

Mr. President,

I would like to reiterate that the Republic of Serbia remains committed to the EU-facilitated dialogue, in sincere belief that the dialogue is the only true path towards a sustainable solution to the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. We are also grateful to the United States of America, President Trump and his envoy Mr. Grenell for their commitment and engagement, because a significant step forward was also made by reaching an agreement on economic normalization on 4 September in Washington, D.C. The fact that Pristina joined “mini-Schengen” is important not only for the economy, but also for every-day, normal life of all communities in Kosovo and Metohija and the entire region.

Unfortunately, I have to say that Pristina also started to violate the Washington agreement in a part relating to one-year moratorium regarding the activities for the recognition of Kosovo by continuing to lobby for new recognitions thus undermining the trust and rendering meaningless the agreements reached in good faith.

I am confident that you share the view that a lot of time has been wasted already. For seven and a half years Pristina has stalled the dialogue by failing to implement the obligations it had undertaken. It is high time they started to act in a serious and responsible

manner by implementing what had been agreed and avoid waiting for another seven and a half years to make progress in the dialogue.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

To live as a Serb in Kosovo and Metohija today is an achievement in itself. Unlike anywhere in Europe, Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija have become an everyday legitimate target just for belonging to another nation and religion. Their houses are set ablaze, their property is usurped and destroyed, their cemeteries and churches desecrated and their families are attacked and intimidated. Videos depicting trampling upon the Serbian flags are shared on social networks, while hatred towards members of the Serb community is still rampant.

The report under review today, as most reviews since UNMIK was deployed, expresses concern over a large number of incidents directed against the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. And yet, despite the appeal to local authorities to respond urgently in order to track down the perpetrators and publicly discourage such acts, justice for Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is slow and unachievable while the number of incidents has not been reduced.

Even during the pandemic coupled with even more adverse life conditions, the acts against the Serb community continued unabated. Just a few weeks ago in the village of Donja Brnjica near Pristina, Serb children were shot at by an Albanian in the elementary school yard. In the village of Babin Most near Obilic, there was an attempt to abduct a Serbian schoolgirl getting back from school. The attacks on families of returnees have never ceased. Not to mention the cases of setting houses on fire, looting and intimidation.

It is no wonder then, Mr. President that internally displaced persons are not returning to their homes. Out of 200,000, twenty years on, a sustainable return has been achieved by a meager 1.9%. Pristina claims that each displaced person who wished to return to Kosovo and Metohija could have done so, but that the Serbs did not return

because they did not wish to do so. The information of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) speaks otherwise while the report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) states “that a considerable number of displaced persons are interested in returning, but many of them remain deprived of their property or face serious obstacles to return“. How can returns be achieved when security cannot still be guaranteed, when it is not possible to enjoy fundamental human rights, access to justice, right to property, freedom of movement?

I cannot help mentioning the Serb cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo and Metohija and the attempts of Pristina to revise history by claiming that the Serb churches in Kosovo and Metohija are not actually Serb. What is next then – to claim that Serbs have never lived in Kosovo and Metohija? Other examples of Pristina’s arrogance towards cultural heritage are repeated attempts to build a road through protected zone of Decani Monastery which has been placed on UNESCO’s List of World Heritage in Danger.

Despite the intervention of Quanta representatives and international organizations (EU, OSCE, KFOR) it is still uncertain whether the final court decision will be enforced since the local authorities did not commit to permanently cease the construction in the special protected zone.

Today, you will probably hear again the falsehoods from the representatives of Pristina perpetuated for 20 years on the Serbian colonialism and alleged genocide against the Albanians. Let me be clear, each victim deserves justice and each perpetrator has to be brought to justice. But this has to apply to everyone. For the past twenty years Serbia has maintained that it was necessary to process also the perpetrators of horrendous crimes committed by the terrorist so-called Kosovo Liberation Army against the Serbs, Roma and some Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. And yet for years we have been hearing Pristina lamenting the Albanian victims, plight of innocent civilians, on “pure and unblemished fight” of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army. The fact that Specialist

Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office have been established more than five years ago indicates that there is another side of the coin. Even though more than five years elapsed since the establishment of the court, we welcome the first indictments but we follow with great concern the activities of Pristina aimed at derogating the functioning of the court, attempting to formally limit and prevent its operations or even attempting to abolish it. We are particularly concerned with the activities aimed at intimidating witnesses and disclosing their identity. It is unheard of that the Specialist Prosecutor's Office felt it necessary to publicize the indictments against Thaci, Veseli and other individuals before the indictments were formally brought against them, which include war crimes and crimes against humanity, killings, enforced disappearances, persecution and torture. According to the Prosecutor's Office this decision was made due to "repeated efforts by Hashim Thaci and Kadri Veseli to obstruct and undermine the work of the Specialist Chambers". In his report, the Secretary-General also singled out this problem.

The initiative on adopting the law on the "protection of the values of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army" is equally inconceivable at a time when indictments are brought against its members for the most serious criminal acts. How can one explain this: the current President of the so-called Kosovo is trying hard to abolish the court which Pristina itself established, in order to avoid his indictment and court proceedings for the crimes he had committed. How can one explain the appearance of a masked man in the so-called KLA veterans' quarters bringing thousands and thousands of documents, including draft indictments, testimony accounts of protected witnesses with their names and personal data? This would be too much even in Hollywood thrillers.

We genuinely hope that despite these unbelievable events and obstructions, the court will manage to conduct proceedings so that the victims of the horrendous crimes will finally receive justice.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

Needless to say, the UNMIK presence in Kosovo and Metohija is still necessary and we expect the mission to continue to actively perform its mandate with equally important presence of EULEX for its engagement in the field of rule of law and KFOR as a major guarantor of security.

In the context of KFOR activities, allow me just to voice our serious concern over the introduced practice that KFOR forces conduct joint patrols with “Kosovo police” forces in the vicinity of the administrative boundary line, which is contrary to the existing security framework according to which KFOR forces are the only partner of the Serbian Armed Forces in securing the administrative boundary line. The announced intention of Pristina officials to introduce a three-month mandatory military service also gives reasons for concern.

This is yet another announcement of a one-sided and unacceptable act of Pristina, contrary to UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and the established KFOR mandate as the only legal and legitimate military structure in the Province.

Mr. President,

In early September, we made a step in the right direction. Economic cooperation is important for future political agreements but the road to political normalization is long. The talks we resumed in Brussels are not easy since major differences in our approach still persist, but we truly believe that dialogue is the only possible way to reach a long-term solution to our problems and ensure better relations, peace and stability in the region.

Thank you for your attention.