

**Statement by Foreign Minister Nikola Selakovic at the UNSC meeting on UNMIK, 15  
October 2021**

Distinguished President of the Security Council,

Esteemed members of the Security Council,

Distinguished Special Representative,

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. I would also like to thank 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, pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, and undiminished in scope, aiming to build and preserve lasting peace, stability and security in the Province.

Mr. Tanin,

Please accept the expressions of our gratitude for your engagement and the cooperation we achieved during your term of office.

Mr. President,

Deep regret and concerns are raised by the fact that the security situation in Kosovo and Metohija in the past period has been marked by an increasing number of various ethnically motivated attacks and incidents targeting Serbs, which was also stated in the Report; that the provisional institutions of self-government (PISG) in Pristina continue to take unilateral steps and refuse to implement the agreements reached in the Brussels dialogue; and that institutional discrimination against Serbs, attacks on the sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the undermining of the economic sustainability of Serb communities in the Province have continued.

We are witnessing that dangerous provocations by Pristina are taking place every day, at an accelerated pace, thus seriously threatening the safety of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and directly violating the agreements and arrangements reached within the Brussels dialogue.

The latest violent incursion of the so-called ROSU units into the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, on 13 October, is the ninth incursion of its kind. Tear gas, shock bombs and unbridled violence are becoming a matter of everyday life for Serbs in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, and that must be stopped immediately.

In the last attack with firearms and chemicals used by Pristina special forces, 71-year-old Verica Djelic died as a result of chemicals used in the intervention, 10 unarmed civilians were wounded, one of whom critically in the back with of an automatic rifle. A three-month-old baby, who miraculously remained unharmed, was also the target of the shooting.

The false excuse for the latest unilateral action, as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell called it, was the fight against organized crime and smuggling. Ladies and gentlemen, Serbia is strongly against organized crime and smuggling, but the members of the UNSC should know that such an important and general global goal, which we all share, was cynically used for an armed attack on unarmed civilians, which began with an automatic rifle raid of pharmacies in which patients of Serbian and other nationalities are supplied with vitally important medicines. Four days before the local elections in Kosovo and Metohija, in order to gain votes in an irresponsible and inhumane way, fully motivated by separatist goals, the current PISG regime used medicines on which people's lives depend to prove its position on the status contrary to UNSCR 1244.

Only a few days earlier, another provocation on the part of Pristina led to a dangerous crisis, when personnel of the so-called ROSU unit, armed with long firearms and reinforced with armoured vehicles, were deployed to administrative crossings between central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija - Brnjak and Jarinje – in order to remove Serbian license plates and replace them with temporary ones, thus violently preventing the free movement of citizens.

These events do not fall within the reporting period covered by the latest Report of the UN Secretary General on the work of UNMIK, but it is incumbent upon us to address them on this occasion, in order to have everyone understand how dramatic the situation on the ground has been and how serious the consequences of Pristina's unilateral actions can be.

The incursions of heavily armed Pristina police formations, composed exclusively of Albanians, into the north of Kosovo and Metohija, under various pretexts and motives, with the use of excessive force, are provocations that have an extremely dangerous potential to destabilize the already sensitive security situation on the ground. The goal of the latest incursions of Pristina's special force personnel into the north of the province was to provoke the Serbs and additionally intimidate them with a demonstration of force, as well as to provoke Belgrade to react hastily in some way.

It is obvious that with such moves Pristina aims to erase the 10 years of dialogue, which is the only way to resolve open issues. These provocations once again demonstrate that the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina, not only do not intend to implement everything agreed in the Brussels dialogue, but that their goal is to completely deny dialogue as a means of resolving problems. An effective response to Pristina's lack of credibility and their dangerous play with fire, which could have unforeseeable consequences, cannot be provided by calling on "both sides" for constructiveness and restraint, which has long been a manner in public communication of some important factors in the international community. There is only one source of destabilization, it has a name – and that is the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina - and after the events of 13 October, it is clear that it can and needs to be stopped by urgent and decisive action of the international community. It is now quite obvious that these are no longer sporadic and isolated provocations by Pristina, but that this is an organized campaign of ethnically motivated violence and discrimination against Serbs.

We also express our concern over the latest imposition of tariffs by Pristina on certain products originating from central Serbia, which was made public on 8 October. We remind you that the unilateral decision of Pristina to impose duties on products from central Serbia in November 2018 resulted in a de facto complete trade blockade and a long-term stalemate in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. In contrast to Pristina, which persistently seeks to raise barriers towards central Serbia through unilateral acts, Belgrade is persistently and consistently working to liberalize the flow of people, goods, services and capital, which is the basic goal of our "Open Balkan" initiative. North Macedonia and Albania joined this initiative, but Pristina did not. This demonstrates once again that there is no grounds to be calling on the "two sides", because Belgrade, that is, our side, is doing everything to preserve peace, stability and create an environment for the prosperity of Southeast European economies, while Pristina is repeatedly doing everything to reignite the Balkan powder keg.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

In the period from March to September this year, which is covered in the latest Report, close to 100 ethnically motivated attacks were carried out against Serbs, their private property, religious and cultural heritage sites. The increase in the frequency of attacks was accompanied by the strengthening of the intensity of ethnically motivated violence, which more and more often targets children, the elderly, women, the few returnees present there, as well as churches and other property of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

This systematically intensifies the ubiquitous sense of insecurity of the remaining Serbs, but also deters potential returnees, who are in fact being told that local Albanian communities can attack them with impunity and prevent them from returning to live in their own homes.

The most striking example of the position of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is the case of the displaced person Dragica Gašić, who moved into her apartment in the municipality of Djakovica again in early June. In that town – to which local Albanians proudly refer as a place forbidden to Serbs - Ms. Gašić, on her return, first faced physical and verbal attacks by citizens of Albanian nationality living there. Instead of being provided protection, that seriously ill woman then became a victim of institutional persecution as well, that the local self-government bodies and the police unleashed against her. Since this is a person who is the first and only Serb returnee to Đakovica after more than twenty years, it was to be expected that, at that moment, at least civil society organizations would attempt to protect her rights. However, NGOs from Djakovica soon joined the activities aimed at the expulsion Ms. Gašić, including those receiving funding from international donors for projects related to strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

I must also mention the latest attack on the house of the only remaining Serbian woman in the center of Pec, retired teacher Rumena Ljubić, whose windows were stoned twice in just 24 hours on 13 October.

Dragica's and Rumena's fate is a frightening reflection of the real situation of human rights that almost every one of over 200,000 displaced Serbs and non-Albanians would face in Kosovo and Metohija - provided that they gather the courage to return to their homes in the Province after more than twenty years. I would like to remind you again that since 1999, only around 1.9% of internally displaced Serbs and other non-Albanians have achieved a sustainable return

to Kosovo and Metohija. In that sense, it is truly unfathomable why this problem has only been noted for more than 20 years, without concrete measures being taken all that time to actually enable and carry out the immediate return of all displaced persons - as required by UNSC Resolution 1244.

Therefore, I believe that the aforementioned will encourage the members of the Security Council and the international presence on the ground to devote priority attention in the future to the issue of the return of displaced persons, which is an important part of the UNMIK mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1244. It is not only a political and legal commitment defined under the mentioned Resolution, it is, you will agree, also a moral obligation of every righteous and peace-oriented actor.

I therefore thank the Secretary-General in particular for keeping this extremely important issue in focus and for calling again, in the conclusions of his Report, for the creation of conditions for the sustainable return of internally displaced persons and the sustainable reintegration of returnees. In this regard, we truly believe that the next report will elaborate in detail on all impediments to the sustainable return of internally displaced persons to Kosovo and Metohija, including long-standing problems with the exercise of the universal right to peaceful enjoyment of their private property as well as those arising from ethnically motivated physical and verbal attacks, acts of intimidation, setting fire to and looting of their property, problems with freedom of movement, official use of the mother tongue, etc.

In that context, we cautiously express hope that the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina - in addition to trying to promote themselves in the international community by using the tragic fate of displaced persons from other parts of the world - will still make some steps forward in the coming period and that in reality, 22 years later, they will finally begin to create conditions for the return of internally displaced Serbs and other non-Albanians.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

Serbian medieval monuments in Kosovo and Metohija, including monuments that, due to their exceptional value but also constantly being subject to threats are inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger, are still among the most endangered cultural heritage in Europe.

I wish to recall that there are over 1,300 Serbian churches and monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija. They testify to the rich and continuous Serbian history forming an essential element of the Serbian national identity and making part of the invaluable historical and civilizational heritage of modern Europe and the world.

Attacks on Serbian cultural and religious heritage are at the same time attacks on the identity of Serbs in the Province and directly affect their sense of safety. These holy sites are still inaccessible to the vast majority of believers, because the freedom of movement has still not been provided to Serbs. In the period from March to September, 15 attacks on Serbian religious and cultural sites were recorded, which was also pointed out in the Report of the Secretary General.

A striking example of disrespect for Serbian cultural and religious monuments in the Province is the case of the Visoki Decani monastery. The monastery, which has been the target of attacks

and shelling several times since 2000, is still secured by KFOR forces due to being under a threat. It is faced with a series of hostile actions, and the perpetrators are not deterred by the fact that this is a World Heritage Site. Despite frequent declaratory statements by the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina about their commitment to the protection of cultural and religious heritage and the rule of law, even the decision of the so-called "constitutional court" of the PISG in Pristina five years ago confirming ownership of Visoki Decani Monastery over 24 hectares, is not respected. We welcome the assessment made by the UN Secretary General in his Report stating that no progress has been made in this regard as well as his call on the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina to ensure the implementation of the Legislation on the Protection of Religious Sites.

Dear Mr. President,

The Republic of Serbia remains committed to finding a compromise political solution, as prescribed under Resolution 1244, which will ensure lasting peace and stability. We firmly believe that dialogue and the implementation of the agreements reached are the only right way to resolve all open issues.

As a state committed to the respect for international law and a member of the United Nations, Serbia opposes any attempt at establishing an artificial balance between the parties in the dialogue, as well as the relativization of responsibility for unilateral acts. It is with indignation that we reject all attempts to, by calling for the so-called "reciprocity" and "recognition", in fact, block the dialogue and divert attention from the fact that the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina are not implementing the agreements and fulfilling obligations undertaken in the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue.

We note with concern that not even eight years after reaching the Brussels Agreement, the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities has not been initiated, although Belgrade has fulfilled all its obligations under that agreement.

There are also numerous and repeated examples of Pristina violating or obstructing agreements reached in dialogue, in the areas of energy, justice, freedom of movement and visits by officials.

One such example is the verdict sentencing Ivan Todosijevic to two years in prison, which is also pointed out in the Secretary General's Report. The Brussels Agreement was directly breached, which was also stated by the representatives of the European Union. With its conduct Pristina caused immeasurable damage to the reconciliation process in Kosovo and Metohija.

Despite the interpretation from the European Commission that this is a violation of the Brussels Agreement, because Todosijevic had to be sentenced by a panel consisting of the majority of judges of Serbian nationality, Pristina still does not take any action in this regard.

Pristina also continued with the practice of banning Serbian officials from entering the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

We believe that it is important that the international community, and especially the European Union, as the guarantor of the agreement, firmly insists that the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina start implementing all the agreements reached.

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

As before, the Republic of Serbia remains fully committed to resolving the issue of missing persons, as also demonstrated through full cooperation with relevant international mechanisms as well as participation in the work of the Working Group on Missing Persons. We expect that the representatives of the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina will fulfill their obligations.

Bearing in mind everything I delivered here today in my address, we hold the position that the international presence in Kosovo and Metohija, pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1244, is still necessary. In addition to UNMIK, the presence of KFOR as the main guarantor of security and EULEX, due to its engagement in the field of the rule of law, is also important. I would like to emphasize once again that Serbia fully supports respect for international law, comprehensive implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and activities of UNMIK in an undiminished scope and with adequate financial resources, so that the Mission fulfills the mandate entrusted to it under the Resolution.

Thank you.