



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

9450th meeting

Monday, 23 October 2023, 3 p.m.

New York

President: Mr. França Danese. (Brazil)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mrs. Onanga
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Bastaki
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America.	Mr. Wood

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 Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2023/735)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.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/2023/735)

The President: 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 Her Excellency Ms. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, and I request the Protocol Officer to escort her to a seat at the Council table.

Ms. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President: 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. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu 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/2023/735, 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 recent key developments in Kosovo. I trust that members had time to go through the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/735), which covers the period from 19 March through 18 September. I will begin my statement today by bringing to member's attention a serious security incident that took place on 24 September near the village of Banjska in the Zvečan municipality in northern Kosovo.

Early in the morning that day, a Kosovo police officer was killed and two others were injured at the entrance of the village, which had been blocked by two vehicles. Over the course of the day and into the evening, Kosovo police and heavily armed elements engaged in gunfire exchanges, resulting in four deaths and a number of arrests.

The Kosovo police seized a significant number of vehicles, military equipment and weapons. The United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) joined the international community in unequivocally condemning the incident and the tragic loss of life, calling for restraint. It is essential that the investigations currently under way provide an opportunity to factually document those events and hold perpetrators accountable.

The major events on 24 September exacerbated an already deteriorating security environment, characterized by an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and contradictory perceptions touching much of the population, especially in northern Kosovo and among Kosovo-Serb communities elsewhere in Kosovo.

In the days, weeks and even months leading up to 24 September, political and security tensions in northern Kosovo steadily rose in the absence of tangible progress in the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU). The high-level meeting held on 14 September in Brussels produced no consensus on the sequence in which prior agreements are to be implemented. That was, yet again, a missed opportunity to engage constructively towards a programme for the implementation of the parties' respective commitments under the agreements made in Brussels and Ohrid earlier this year.

Both sides have exchanged inflammatory public allegations, damaging the fragile communication channels between the communities in Kosovo and between political leaders in Belgrade and Pristina. During my interactions with a wide array of interlocutors, including municipal, religious, civil society organizations and business leaders, the most common sentiments I have encountered are frustration and concern caused by an uncertain future. Tensions and anxiety across Kosovo, reported particularly from members of Kosovo Serb communities, have been fuelled by divisive rhetoric and narratives. Rather than stoking tensions through political messages directed at one group, elected leaders bear responsibility for addressing the security needs and broader socioeconomic concerns of all segments of society, regardless of ethnic, linguistic or political background.

Setbacks like the boycott by Kosovo Serbs of the 23 April local elections in northern Kosovo, where they represent the majority of the population, ensuing questions of adequate political representation; and the terrible violence on 29 May that led to serious injuries for 93 Kosovo Force (KFOR) personnel, as well as for civilians, represent grave dangers to achieving long-term peace and stability. The current political impasse, with its impact on the security and well-being of the population, can only be overcome through compromise that should be worked out in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

De-escalatory measures are critical to reducing tensions. In that regard, I share the hopes of many that the outcome of the EU- and United States-led meetings held separately in Pristina and Belgrade on 21 October will place the dialogue back on a forward path, with firm commitment by both sides to implement de-escalatory measures and the proposals set forth during the meetings. This includes recommitment by both parties to fully implement all previous dialogue agreements. Accordingly, work on the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities should begin without delay or preconditions, alongside all other essential agreements.

We should keep in mind that failure to achieve political compromise will continue to adversely affect the well-being of ordinary people, including their ability to receive basic services and realize their socioeconomic potential. In that regard, it is crucial to note that delays in the implementation of the dialogue agreements led to the postponement of an EU donor conference envisaged in the implementation annex of the February agreement, which likely would have attracted substantial economic support and investment opportunities.

We have often spoken during Council meetings about the positive ways in which sustainable political agreements have an impact on people's lives, even when they come at a cost. Perhaps too rarely do we talk about the even greater cost that accrues from not reaching agreements. Here, I am speaking of the cost to all communities — be they Serbs, Albanians or others residing in different parts of Kosovo and the entire region. Tensions, isolation and a growing lack of trust in political leaders' ability to address peoples' most immediate interests and legitimate grievances witnessed these past months — and worse, the resort to violence and intimidation by those of ill will — threaten the hard-won gains achieved through the EU-facilitated dialogue. Responsible leadership and compromise are required to return to a more productive political process.

We know the maxim that there is no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. It cannot be stressed enough that regional cooperation and integration initiatives, in all forms, should be welcomed and prioritized in order to contribute to a more productive dialogue. Peace, prosperity, progress, sustainability and connectivity were some of the main themes highlighted during the high-level week of the General Assembly in September and during the Berlin process summit held last week in Tirana. Today, in this body, I believe that it is of the utmost importance that the international community urge both Pristina and Belgrade to foster purposeful and concerted actions in line with those main priorities, including the observation that no single leader or actor can expect to go it alone in overcoming the current global challenges.

I already pointed out in my statement in April (see S/PV.9312) — and it should be repeated today — the need for clear and continuous communication with the public on issues affecting their livelihoods, health and human rights — issues such as land expropriation and the freedom of movement of people and goods, including across the administrative boundary line. The work of rule of law institutions must be anchored in the human rights framework and should be clearly and publicly explained and communicated in order to avoid misperceptions and ensure the equality of all before the law.

I have welcomed the adoption of a law regulating the application process for the status of conflict-related sexual violence survivors by the Assembly of Kosovo. I would also encourage authorities to consider the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence in that regard. Following continued advocacy by UNMIK, United Nations agencies and civil society groups for the inclusion, in the Constitution, of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we welcome the Constitutional Court's decision of 1 August that paves the way for the inclusion of international human rights norms on the rights of persons with disabilities within the Kosovo legal framework.

This year we mark the fifth anniversary of UNMIK's trust-building agenda. Despite a track record of success in strengthening dialogue, social cohesion and resilience at the grass-roots level, the environment has become more challenging this past year. Nonetheless,

we remain strongly committed to continuing to work with our partners from all communities in Kosovo to foster communication and understanding among people. Doing so nurtures the ground for acceptance of the difficult but essential compromises necessary to achieve progress in the dialogue at the leadership level. As announced six months ago, the Barabar Centre was launched with support from UNMIK and the Pristina municipality — partnership at its best. Used in both official languages in Kosovo, Albanian and Serbian, the word “Barabar” means equality and fairness — and we need equality and fairness. The Centre is a safe space in the heart of Pristina, where people from all walks of life and all communities can meet to freely deliberate and transcend divisive narratives. Since its opening in May this year, the Centre has organized more than 40 multi-ethnic events, demonstrating that even during challenging times, it is possible, and indeed desirable, to get the people together.

To advance both the women and peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas, the Mission continues to support women-led civil society organizations and encourage the involvement of youth and women leaders in decision-making at all levels. We support initiatives aimed at promoting the active and meaningful participation of women in political processes and at integrating gender perspectives into the normalization process between Belgrade and Pristina.

We will also continue to support young people, including through the annual United Nations Youth Assembly in Kosovo. The fifth Youth Assembly was held this year at the height of political tensions. Still, more than 150 youth leaders from across Kosovo and the region came together and constructively addressed critical issues, including combating misinformation and hate speech, youth decision-making and stopping domestic violence, just to name a few. We thank the United Nations Kosovo team for their close cooperation in that regard.

Together with our partners, the Mission ensures equal access to justice by improving courtroom infrastructure, providing free legal assistance and representation to more than 2,000 people from all communities throughout Kosovo and offering interpretation services. We will continue to do so.

I wish to take this opportunity to commend the resilience of local actors, including UNMIK partners, committed women, men and young people from all

Kosovo communities who, despite divisive narratives and challenging realities, work tirelessly to bring about more understanding between their communities.

I would like to reiterate UNMIK’s support for the EU-facilitated dialogue, with a sense of urgency, in the light of the instability that has characterized the current reporting period. We are committed to supporting all voices rejecting zero-sum polarization in favour of compromise and collaboration. We will continue our trust-building work, although we often hear that trust is at its lowest level at this moment. But our answer was, is and remains, if not now, when? Let me say it again and let me say it very clearly — dialogue is the only way forward.

Before concluding, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous contributions of one of my key partners during a very challenging time in Kosovo: outgoing KFOR Commander Major General Angelo Michele Ristuccia of Italy. His leadership was instrumental during the management of several crises that erupted over the past year. I also extend a special welcome to his successor, Major General Özkan Ulutaş of Türkiye, with whom I know we will enjoy a similarly close working relationship in fulfilment of our common mandate.

I conclude by expressing my deep appreciation to the members of the Council for their support. That support is indispensable to UNMIK’s continued work to help ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all people in Kosovo.

The President: I thank Ms. Ziadeh for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia.

Ms. Brnabić (Serbia): I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the Secretary-General, António Guterres, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Ms. Ziadeh, for the attention they dedicate to Kosovo and Metohija.

As always, I would like to emphasize the importance of regular and objective reporting on the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, autonomous province of the Republic of Serbia, in line with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia but also with the Charter of the United Nations, resolution 1244 (1999) and basic principles of international law. I am thankful for the

opportunity to share our views regarding the most recent UNMIK report (S/2023/735) with those present and with the international public.

I will do my best to refrain from overly bureaucratic language and present the views in a clear and straightforward manner, simply because the situation in the past two years and especially in the past 12 months — and I fully agree with Ms. Ziadeh — has become so grave that we all need to try to understand, not as politicians but, first and foremost, as human beings, what is happening and where to go from here in order to provide at least a glimpse of hope to those in Kosovo and Metohija who suffer every day — at least a glimpse of hope that stability and long-term peace are possible.

From what we can all see on the ground, based on numerous examples in the past 12 months, the officials in Pristina, the Administration in Pristina, regrettably I have to say, to put it in the simplest form, have only three key messages for Serbs, other non-Albanians and the international community. And everything we are seeing in those reports and everything that is happening every day on the ground can be summed up in those three key messages.

The first message is that those Serbs who left after 1999 or during the ethnic cleansing — the pogrom — of 2004 should not come back. They are not welcome. It is deeply disturbing, unfortunate and also embarrassing that Kosovo and Metohija remains, according to all relevant United Nations reports, a territory which, compared to all post-conflict territories in this whole crazy world of ours, has the lowest number of returnees. Fewer than 2 per cent of displaced people have returned to Kosovo and Metohija. I repeat, fewer than 2 per cent. That is not by accident.

When they go back — if they try to go back — they usually see that their private property has been illegally seized by someone. They then obviously go to the authorities to report that usurpation and ask for assistance, hoping for justice and fairness. On most occasions, instead of receiving assistance, they find themselves arrested and end up in prison.

Just in the past few months, to cite a few examples, individuals, such as Dušan Arsić from Matica near Pristina, Časlav Jolić and Gavriilo Milosavljević from Istok, and Milorad Đoković from Vitomirac, were all arrested — all of them — on charges of war crimes, although they entered Kosovo and Metohija on multiple

occasions in the past and were never arrested or charged with anything whatsoever, until such time as they asked for their private property, land and homes to be returned to them. At that point in time, the charges suddenly emerged. It was only after legal processes aimed at reclaiming usurped property had begun. That is a clear message to displaced Serbs from the officials in Pristina. The message is “Do not return. You are not welcome.” Hence again the humiliating fact is that Kosovo and Metohija remains the world champion out of all the post-conflict territories around the world in terms of the least number of returnees.

The second message that is being sent to Serbs, in the most brutal ways, is: those who stayed, who still live on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija and who want to stay should leave. That message is being sent through months and years of systematic, outright annulment of even the most basic human rights of Serbs and other non-Albanians, turning their lives into a constant nightmare of insecurity caused by the total and utter absence of the rule of law and marked by arbitrary decision-making as to who will be arrested, taken into custody, beaten up, tortured, humiliated and kept in prison for unknown periods of time, and when. They are kept wondering if their children, brothers, fathers and husbands will be shot at freely simply because they are Serbs, if their priests will be deported and their property confiscated and if those who shoot at them and those who beat them up will always, as a rule, be let to walk free — as is happening every day in today’s Kosovo and Metohija. By doing that every day of every week of every month of every year for the past few years, Pristina has managed to generate a dangerous security crisis, as we have also seen in the most recent UNMIK report. What we see in Kosovo and Metohija today is comprehensive political, legal, institutional and physical violence against Serbs.

From a human standpoint, the absolute turning point when everyone understood that what Pristina wants is for Serbs to leave, was not actually the attempted murder of the 11-year-old boy Stefan Stojanović and his 21-year-old cousin Miloš Stojanović while they were participating in a Christmas procession in Gotovuša, near Štrpce. No, it was, actually, the day when Azem Kurtaj, who committed that crime by shooting at children on Christmas and who is a member of the so-called Kosovo security forces — which is, by the way, an illegal formation according to paragraph 15 of resolution 1244 (1999) — was let go as a free

man. Again, Azem Kurtaj who shot and wounded an 11-year-old child on Christmas is today a free man in Kosovo and Metohija. He was granted a complete amnesty by Pristina's judiciary. And that is perhaps all anyone needs to know about the rule of law in Kosovo and Metohija and all anyone needs to know about the conditions in which Serbs and other non-Albanians live in Kosovo and Metohija today.

Therefore, let me pose this question to all of us at this meeting. When an Albanian, a member of the so-called Kosovo security forces, shoots and severely wounds a child and is then proclaimed a free man, is that not a call by officials in Pristina for anyone else to shoot at Serbs, terrorize them, wound or kill them? Why would they not do so? There is no consequence for such acts. The amnesty for Kurtaj is basically an open invitation for others to repeat those kinds of acts.

On the other hand, interestingly, in that same legal system and according to that kind of standard of the rule of law, which freed a criminal who shot at children, if one is a Serb, as are brothers Andrija and Mihajlo Mitić, one gets arrested and detained in prison for a month for not wearing a seat belt. For not wearing a seat belt, one ends up in prison for one month if one is a Serb. It is unbelievable. But the sad truth is that this is what the everyday life of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija looks like today.

Unfortunately, we have even more paradoxical examples.

Sladan Trajković and Zlatko Arsić were both accused and arrested for alleged war crimes. Surprisingly, they both used to be members of the so-called Kosovo police, in which, in order to get employed, they had to obtain security clearances from Pristina. Therefore, they passed security clearances by Pristina, were accepted into the Kosovo police force, served for years as part of the multi-ethnic policing, thanks to the implementation of the Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations by Belgrade and Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, and once they left the police, they were arrested and charged with being war criminals. Sladan Trajković, who had been part of the Kosovo police since 2013 and had passed all the security clearances, was arrested on 15 December and is still in custody now, more than 10 months later. Zlatko Arsić, who had been part of the Kosovo police even longer and, surprisingly, had also been awarded a medal by Pristina for his service with the Kosovo police

as an honourable man, was arrested on 7 March and is, of course, also still in custody. He is still in prison and not with his family.

Therefore, the very simple truth is that, in today's Kosovo, if one is a Serb, one can be arbitrarily arrested, charged and kept in custody for as long as its politicians wish. And that is happening in the presence of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), UNMIK and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). Can Council members imagine what life in Kosovo and Metohija would be like if it were governed by Pristina without the presence of KFOR, UNMIK and EULEX?

Just since the beginning of this year, six Serbs have been shot at and no one has been found criminally responsible. In the past two and a half years, there have been an unbelievable 434 ethnically motivated attacks on Serbs and their property — a 50 per cent increase compared to the period before the Administration of Prime Minister Albin Kurti — and we still do not know if anybody has been held accountable or if any charges have been pressed against any of the perpetrators.

As a direct result of that terror, 11 per cent of Serbs have left northern Kosovo and Metohija since Albin Kurti came to power. I will repeat that: 11 per cent of Serbs have left Kosovo and Metohija in the past two years owing the campaign of systematic and widespread violence against Serbs and the deliberate creation of unbearable living conditions for them. In that regard, the question posed before this body is whether that serves as a reason for action or merely a cause for statements.

The third clear message from the officials in Pristina to Serbs, but also to international community, is this: the agreements reached shall not be implemented, and those agreements or parts of the agreements that were in fact implemented will be annulled, dismantled or blocked. As the UNMIK report clearly states, and as have all the others in the past 10 years at least, not a word of the Brussels Agreement — the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations — has been implemented by Pristina. That must change.

It is high time for establishing the community of Serb municipalities, which was agreed on five or six years ago but has still not been done. Establishing that community is an essential element on which the implementation of any further agreement rests. But I want to state clearly that it has to be the community

of Serb municipalities that was agreed based on the signed agreements from 2013 and 2015. It cannot not be just any organization bearing that name. The method of forming and adopting the statute of the community of Serb municipalities, as well as its powers, has been clearly defined and cannot be subject to interpretation. The general principles for establishing the community of Serb municipalities, its legal framework and a detailed list of its competencies, are clearly stated in the 2015 agreement, which was signed by Isa Mustafa, as the official representative of Pristina, in the presence of Federica Mogherini, the then High Representative of the European Union (EU). We all know that in the past two years Pristina has openly stated on several occasions that it has no interest in or intention of supporting the establishment of the community of Serb municipalities.

To make things worse, in the past 12 months Pristina has actively been undermining everything that was achieved through the Brussels Agreement. On 3 November of last year, Albin Kurti removed the Director of the Regional Police Directorate North, effectively dismantling the multi-ethnic police force in Kosovo and Metohija, in direct contradiction of article 9 of the Brussels Agreement. Only after that action did the representatives of the Serbian people leave the institutions in Pristina. Their departure occurred after Kurti essentially expelled them from those institutions. In yet another signal that it does not recognize or care for the Brussels Agreement, on 4 August, amid the security crisis in northern Kosovo and Metohija, Pristina tried to revoke the licence of the telecommunications company Mobile TeleSystems, or MTS. That measure is a direct violation of the Brussels Agreement and the accomplishments that were achieved through it.

Then, on 14 June, Pristina also directly breached the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), and not for the first time. The ban on the movement of Serbian goods, or goods from central Serbia, in Kosovo and Metohija directly violates principles of free trade, the CEFTA Agreement and chapter IV of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and Pristina. As a direct consequence, Serbs and other non-Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija are finding it increasingly difficult to access food and medicines. We have a looming humanitarian crisis. Health-care facilities in predominantly Serbian areas cannot procure basic medical supplies such as oxygen. Medicines that are no longer available include chemotherapy drugs, anaesthetics, antibiotics, infusion

solutions and vaccines. There is a maximum of two weeks' worth of medicines available for extremely urgent cases and surgeries. They even lack BCG vaccines for babies.

When we talk about the fact that Pristina is simply ignoring international agreements — whether that means the Brussels Agreement, CEFTA, or the Stabilization and Association Agreement — let us look at how Pristina met the international community's most recent requests for de-escalation. But first, what led to the escalation of an already terrible situation on the ground? The key event, from which everything began to move irreversibly towards comprehensive destabilization, was the sham local elections held in April in four municipalities in the north. Instead of understanding that the Serbs had left the provisional institutions in a clear call to Pristina to fully implement the Brussels Agreement — finally, after more than 10 years — and to save the dialogue process, Pristina decided to escalate things further. It decided to hold local elections in which only 0.03 per cent of Serbs participated, when Serbs make up more than 95 per cent of the population in northern Kosovo and Metohija. The elections were conducted in a reduced number of polling stations and voting took place in special containers guarded by fully armed militia. “Free and fair” is not the term anyone would use to describe those elections.

Following those events — because they cannot be referred to as elections — appointees of Pristina, who cannot be referred to as elected mayors, forcibly entered the municipal offices accompanied by special units of the Kosovo police armed with long-barrelled guns, which is another direct violation of the Brussels Agreement. What happened in the following days — as all Council members know, and as we read in the UNMIK report — was basically a terrible escalation. Protests resulted in injuries to more than 50 unarmed Serbs. Injuries were inflicted on KFOR members, which is tragic and unacceptable. On that occasion, three Serbs were hospitalized for gunshot wounds and four Serbs were arrested. The most severe injuries were sustained by Dragiša Gajak, who was shot in the back with a burst from an automatic rifle, suffering injuries to his spine, abdomen and hand. The member of the special unit of the Kosovo police responsible for that crime has not been arrested or even charged.

Rather than pursuing the criminals who shot at the demonstrators, Pristina is keeping people like Dušan Obrenović in prison. Obrenović, as can be clearly seen

in the video footage, was peacefully protesting against violence, but that and subsequent other evidence did not prevent him from being arrested, after which he was brutally mistreated and beaten up. He remains in custody to this day. On 3 June the EU called for de-escalation. And since that day, Pristina has taken no less than 23 escalatory steps in northern Kosovo and Metohija. A total of 24 Serbs have been arrested since the EU demanded immediate de-escalation. One of them, Milun Milenković Lune, was brutally and inhumanely beaten during his arrest and detention, documented in medical records and reports. He is accused of participating in citizen protests in Zvečan, even though he was not even present in Zvečan on the day of the protests. He is also still detained. The UNMIK report confirms that there is a video showing the mistreatment and degradation of one of the arrested individuals while in police custody, which was widely circulated on social media. The Kosovo police intercepted two underage children, Kristijan Radosavljević, aged 15, and Dara Radosavljević, aged 17, riding quad bikes in the village of Rudine near Zvečan, and brutally beat them — a 15-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl. Their mother found her son kneeling with his hands covering his head, while two heavily armed policemen stood over him.

On 23 June, the so-called Kosovo security forces conducted a military march with hundreds of their members in southern Mitrovica and in the outskirts of northern Mitrovica. On that occasion, the EU High Representative, Josep Borrell Fontelles, said that the escalation continued. And that was after the EU had called for de-escalation. He said,

“[E]scalation continues.... Very alarmed by the situation in the north of Kosovo: extrajudicial arrests of Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo security forces marching in South Mitrovica.”

On 28 June, on our most important national holiday, Vidovdan, the Kosovo police stopped, as many as three times, the car in which the elder son of the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić — Danilo — was traveling. It is a clear, brutal provocation. On 29 June, Pristina unilaterally declared the Civil Protection a terrorist organization without coordination or consultation with international partners. And so on.

As Council members heard from the Special Representative, Pristina continued the illegal expropriation of land owned by Serbs in Zubin

Potok and Leposavić. They also enacted a new law on expropriation, legalizing the unlawful seizure of Serbian land. Pristina persisted in establishing illegal bases in northern Kosovo on land unlawfully taken from Serbs. The EU delegation in Pristina stated that,

“The establishment of four Kosovo police bases on private and socially owned land — in some cases prior to initiating expropriation procedures — raises concerns about property rights in the north of Kosovo and must be adequately addressed”.

Finally, only two days ago, the abbot of the Devina Vode monastery near Zvečan, Father Fotije, was deported to North Macedonia without any clear explanation. He was just deported. And during the same brief period, after the EU called for de-escalation, as many as 74 ethnically motivated attacks against Serbs occurred.

The crisis in Kosovo and Metohija escalated tragically but predictably on 24 September, when an armed conflict occurred between a group of armed Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija and police and paramilitary formations from Pristina in the village of Banjska and its surroundings. Investigations are ongoing to provide all the answers and shed light on all the uncertainties surrounding that event, including the manner in which two of the three deceased Serbs lost their lives, which appears to have been by cold-blooded execution following their surrender. I want to assert responsibly that Belgrade and Serbia's security forces and structures had nothing to do with that incident, and we are prepared to provide all the information and evidence that are available today to the international community to confirm that statement. I would also like to use this opportunity to express my sincere regret for the loss of human lives, and I hope that it never happens again. The events that occurred in Banjska were unfortunately a logical consequence of the reign of fear and terror that Pristina decided to enforce, despite the clear demands for de-escalation made by the international community, precisely counting on the peaceful resistance of the Serbian people in northern Kosovo and Metohija to become something more.

To sum up, we have continuously and repeatedly expressed concerns about the dangers that could arise from Pristina's refusal to fulfil the obligations undertaken in the dialogue with Belgrade, facilitated by the EU. The current situation on the ground is the inevitable consequence of a series of more than a dozen

unilateral actions by Pristina. Displaced Serbs cannot return to Kosovo and Metohija. When they try, men get arrested, and women like Dragica Gašić are threatened and terrorized. The Serbs who stayed live in terror and insecurity every hour of every day. Pristina basically wants them out and is demonstrating that in clear terms, and 11 per cent of them have already left. Make no mistake — what we are witnessing is a campaign of silent ethnic cleansing. The campaign of systematic and widespread violence against Serbs and the deliberate creation of unbearable living conditions for them can be seen in the gradual but permanent denial of their basic human rights, the attacks by members of armed Pristina formations, the physical assaults on Serbs and their property and the false indictments.

All previous agreements emanating from the dialogue have been brutally violated, dealing a fatal blow to the very idea of negotiations, normalization and reconciliation. Those repressive and ethnically motivated actions were carefully calculated to provoke reactions from Serbs in northern Kosovo and Metohija, for the sole purpose of later exploiting such responses in order to continue and intensify the reprisals and the terror.

Let me underscore in the simplest possible terms what the goal of the Republic of Serbia is.

First, we want to see the implementation of all past agreements, namely, the Brussels Agreement and the establishment of the community of Serb municipalities, in line with the agreements reached in 2013 and 2015.

Secondly, we want security for our people and for all people living in Kosovo and Metohija. While the dialogue continues and we search for a compromise that will ensure long-term peace and stability, for a historic reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians and for prosperity, I ask the Council to help the people living in Kosovo and Metohija, including Serbs and non-Albanians, to live in peace and enjoy basic freedoms, safety and security without constant intimidation and persecution.

Thirdly, we stand for and firmly believe in the principles of the international rule of law and the Charter of the United Nations and will continue calling for full respect for resolution 1244 (1999).

Fourthly, we want peace and stability. Together, let us take steps to prevent the crisis from spiralling completely out of control. Dialogue is the only way to

solve the problems in Kosovo and Metohija. At this point in time, the most rational approach would be for KFOR, in line with its mandate pursuant to resolution 1244 (1999), to temporarily assume full responsibility for security in northern Kosovo and Metohija. We also call for new local elections in the north of Kosovo and Metohija to be held as soon as possible. I can only say that Belgrade will remain committed to the dialogue despite all of the difficulties.

The President: I thank Ms. Brnabić for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Osmani-Sadriu.

Mr. Osmani-Sadriu: I had the honour of speaking before the Security Council at an Arria Formula meeting just a few days ago, giving voice to thousands of survivors of sexual violence from the previous war in Kosovo. It is when you speak of the pain of those who suffered the most that you are reminded, again and again, of the suffering that wars inflict upon the most vulnerable. But the story of the survivors of Kosovo is the story of their resilience, of turning their pain into strength and turning their agony into positive contributions to their society and country. As I said that day, the victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo chose not just to survive but also to thrive.

That is their story and that is also the story of Kosovo — a free, independent, sovereign, democratic and thriving Republic. And it will be so for as long as the Earth circles the sun.

I speak before the Council today as the President of a country that lost approximately 13,000 people in just a few months of war — with thousands left unaccounted for through enforced disappearance; the highest per capita number of children killed in any war in the former Yugoslavia; almost every house destroyed; thousands of people tortured as political and war prisoners; thousands of women raped as a tool of war; approximately 80 per cent of the people of Kosovo forced to leave their houses; and practically everything burned to ashes. Yet, once again, we chose to rise from the ashes, rebuild our lives and build a future in which all our people, no matter their background, can live in a country free of the fear, discrimination or propaganda that can spur violence; a country in which the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the main pillars on which we stand; and a country that values its alliances and partnerships as the bedrock of our success.

We are also a country that has extended the hand of cooperation to our neighbour Serbia, and we are participants in a dialogue through which we want to peacefully resolve all our remaining differences. We decided to do so despite the fact that Serbia has never asked for forgiveness, never shown any sign of repentance for the crimes committed by the Milošević regime and never accepted a reality that happened before the eyes of the whole world. Instead, it has remained in a state of denial and has made every possible effort to take our region back to the 1990s. I am here to say that we will not let that happen. I am here to confirm the commitment of the people of Kosovo to moving forward, not backwards. I am here to reaffirm the commitment of all of Kosovo's institutions to preventing that setback, which would endanger the hard-won freedoms that we have achieved together with so many here — together with democracies from all over the world, because the sovereign and free Republic of Kosovo is one of the greatest successes in human history and a testament to what democracies can achieve when they stand together against autocracies and genocidal regimes. And that outstanding example of unity in the face of adversity is as important now as it was in the 1990s. That is why I believe this is not just another meeting of the Security Council on Kosovo.

On 24 September the people of Kosovo woke up to the news that one police sergeant had been killed and another wounded in the early-morning hours. That day, Kosovo was the target of an act of aggression by Serbia through terrorist and paramilitary groups. Today I want to take a moment to honour the memory of Afrim Bunjaku, now a hero of Kosovo, whom we lost as he was defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our republic. Heroes such as Afrim Bunjaku remind us on a daily basis how precious freedom is and how vigilant we should be in defending it. May he rest in peace and his memory serve as a reminder to all of us of the imperative of standing up to authoritarian and malign forces not just in the Western Balkans, but all around the world.

While everything has changed since 24 September, at the same time much has remained a constant. On the one hand, Kosovo's commitment to protecting our sovereignty, promoting and advancing the rule of law and democracy and fostering positive neighbourly relations remains unwavering. On the other hand, Serbia's determination to destabilize the region, occupy land and replicate Milošević and Putin's playbooks is

at its peak. What Serbia expected to happen that day was that it would succeed in its Crimea-style planned annexation of northern Kosovo. What took Serbia by surprise was the unwavering determination and professional response of the Kosovo police forces.

During the attack and ever since, Kosovo institutions have maintained close coordination with the international security presence in the country. As has been the case historically, Kosovo will continue to work closely with its allies and partners to counteract such acts and prevent them from ever happening again. But what we have heard from Serbia today is an extension of its recurring efforts to tone down the scale of this unprecedented security threat and act of aggression against Kosovo. They want to twist the entire truth that unfolded before the eyes of the world. They are trying to switch the place of the aggressor with that of the victim of the aggression. But the facts are irrefutable, and the evidence illustrates the contrary. Those terrorist groups and paramilitary forces have been financed, trained, armed and have received political support and shelter from one source — the Republic of Serbia.

Let me turn to the first element. The two terrorist organizations known as Civilna Zaštita and Severna Brigada have continued to be financed by State institutions of Serbia. In fact, they do not even hide it. They are appointed as parallel, albeit illegal and criminal structures, to function in the Republic of Kosovo, and then given monthly payments. Before the terrorist act in September, those groups were engaged in terrorizing, intimidating and threatening Kosovo Serbs who live in Kosovo and in attacking NATO soldiers. Let me repeat that. They are paid and financed by Serbia to attack none other than Kosovo Serbs.

I will now turn to the second element, the training of those terrorist organizations. As the investigation shows, there has been constant military-type training of those terrorist groups in the military bases of Serbia, including in Pasuljanske Livade and Rashka. There is video evidence of it, and Serbian State institutions, especially defence institutions, even proudly admit training those terrorist organizations.

Moving on to the third element, the arming, the weapons that we confiscated from the terrorists on that day alone amounted to a quantity that could be used by as many as 400 people. Most of them were military-grade weapons that are manufactured only through Serbia's State military industry. Many of them were

produced in 2022, and some only six weeks before the attack. The weapons and armoured vehicles were smuggled in through illegal routes and some came in through vehicles carrying false NATO signs that the terrorists put on their armoured vehicles, full of weapons and little-green-men uniforms. That sounds familiar, right?

And finally, the fourth and perhaps most important element is the political support and the sheltering of terrorists in Serbia. Radoičić, the leader of the terrorist group, who openly admitted being in charge of this attack, is one of Serbia's President's closest collaborators and partners. He even sits in National Security Council meetings in Serbia right next to the Serbian President and is still free and walking around Serbia despite admitting leading that attack. In addition to that, Serbia made sure to announce a day of mourning for the terrorists who killed a police officer while he was defending our country from aggression. And let us not ignore the massive propaganda and constant hints that were broadcast on the streets, at football matches, in interviews and all over Serbia ahead of the 24 September act of aggression. The infamous saying "When the army returns to Kosovo" appeared in graffiti all over Serbia and all the way to Russia.

In the light of that evidence, we must make one thing clear. This is not just some quarrel between two countries or a blame game. What happened on 24 September was not merely an attack on Kosovo. It was a plan to destabilize the entire Western Balkans. It was an attack on democracy and freedom, as well as the peace and stability that the Security Council helped build. We must therefore be in this together. The international community was united in responding by unequivocally condemning this terrorist act against Kosovo. The amount and types of weapons confiscated represented a significant threat to the safety not only of citizens of Kosovo but also of international personnel, including NATO troops.

The United States, the United Kingdom, European Union member States and other countries have called for everyone involved in planning and carrying out the attack to be held accountable, and have stated that Serbia must fully cooperate. While condemning the act of those paramilitary and terrorist groups, the international community widely praised the Kosovo police's reaction as very professional and fully coordinated with NATO forces and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. Today the Kosovo police stands proudly

as the epitome of professionalism and diversity within the region's law-enforcement landscape and beyond. It exemplifies a resounding success story that has unfolded over the two decades of our free republic. That remarkable achievement is a testament to the unwavering commitment of our institutions to the cause of law enforcement but also to the visionary partnership of our international allies supporting us in this regard. Whether in the south or the north, the east or the west, the police's unwavering mission is solely to instil trust, safety and security in neighbourhoods and communities across the entire country.

While Vučić aims to conceal his true intentions, his acts reveal his underlying motives. He wants more territory. It is that simple. However, it is also that much more concerning. And to everyone acting in disbelief that anyone would do something like that and use 1990s tactics in 2023, I say that rationality always parts ways with autocrats. Rationality stands no chance among malign intentions, expansionist appetites and imperialist ambitions.

It is utterly unfortunate that Serbia sees violence as a solution to everything. In the past few months alone, Serbia, through its illegal gangs, abducted three Kosovo police officers within the territory of Kosovo, attacked countless journalists and 93 KFOR soldiers. And, as confirmed by the White House National Security Council, there has been "a large Serbian military deployment along the border with Kosovo". Calling it a destabilizing development, the statement went on confirming "unprecedented staging of advanced Serbian artillery, tanks, mechanized infantry units". Serbia pulled some of its troops from the border only after United States warnings that it could face punitive measures. But significant military force continues to be permanently based around in the area, with Serbia's 48 forward operating bases around the border with Kosovo.

A clearer understanding of the situation also requires a better understanding of the mastermind behind it all. Autocratic leaders often master the art of projecting themselves as promoters of peace, all the while consolidating power behind a façade. Their narratives and propaganda make it challenging for some to discern the true nature or intentions of their leadership.

Serbia's Government cynically claims that what happened on 24 September was a righteous response of local Serbs against so-called "pressure and terror".

Let me be clear — what is happening is not a result of pressure and terror against Kosovo Serbs, but instead a clear reflection of Serbia's strong and historic appetite for more instability — for more territory.

I invite all the members of the Council to come to Kosovo so that they can witness first-hand the progress in my country. We have made significant strides in establishing one of the most advanced constitutional and legal frameworks in the world that steadfastly protects the rights of minority communities.

In what I believe is hard to find in the vast majority of the countries around the world, the Serb ethnic minority in Kosovo, which comprises about 3 to 4 per cent of our entire population, holds veto power over amendments to the Constitution and any law deemed to be of vital interest, ensuring their say in key legislative decisions that relate to education, religion, rights of communities, local election reforms, municipalities, the use of language and symbols and other decisions. That is to say that even if more than 90 per cent of the members of Parliament would vote in favour, nothing can pass without their consent.

With the highest level of decentralization and vast decision-making powers granted to municipalities, at the local level, Kosovo's law on local self-Government guarantees special rights for minority communities through enhanced municipal competencies in a great many areas.

That all stands as a testament to Kosovo's commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse society where the rights of all its citizens, including minorities, are protected and upheld. I keep repeating and will say this again to every Serb living in Kosovo:

“Kosovo is your home as much as it is mine. I want to work with each and every one of you to make it a home where you prosper and thrive and contribute to making it a better place for all.”

The Constitution and legislation in force provide for strong protections on the rights of the Kosovo Serb community to use their language at all levels, both national and local. The Serb language has the status of an official language in all the territory of Kosovo, while education, as well as other services, are also guaranteed in their language.

Recognizing the profound significance of cultural heritage, our Constitution guarantees the Orthodox Church a special level of protection in our country,

further cemented by the Law on Special Protective Zones, while independent and professional assessments confirm that Orthodox churches in Kosovo enjoy a high level of security.

Yet, as I speak of enhanced and advanced rights for Kosovo Serbs and every minority in Kosovo, ethnic cleansing through administrative means — as qualified by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights — is ongoing in Serbia, more precisely in Preševo Valley. Through the passivization of residence addresses, the Serbian Government is tracelessly, that is, without issuing any written notice or document, wiping out Albanians from the civil registry of Serbia and, as a result, denying them all of their basic rights. Those violations of rights, also confirmed by United States Department of State reports and some of the latest resolutions of the European Parliament, are further exacerbated by the hate speech and discriminatory language that is routinely used by media and politicians in Serbia.

Justice is the centrepiece of our every action. The rule of law is the bedrock of our governance. It is shameful, but also unacceptable, how Serbia attempts to label our rule-of-law efforts as acts against Kosovo Serbs. This false play of the inter-ethnic crime card to undermine our pursuit of justice is a strategy we fervently reject. We stand ready and firm in our resolve to combat crime and criminal organizations with an unwavering commitment that transcends ethnicity, religion or any other background. A criminal is a criminal, no matter their nationality.

In our relentless pursuit of justice, we adamantly uphold and unwaveringly adhere to the highest standards of human rights. Anything contrary to that will never be acceptable to us. As President, I raise my voice every single time those standards are not upheld. Furthermore, it has now become a standard practice to have the presence of the international community in a monitoring capacity in all of these processes.

But to put things in perspective and to speak of the actual cases that are classified as cases of inter-ethnic crime, I am very proud to say that since 2008, the year of our independence, when the annual level of inter-ethnic crimes was a total of 63 cases, we have witnessed a trend of constant reduction over the years. In 2023, the total number of inter-ethnic crimes thus far is 19, out of which almost 70 per cent consist of chanting, swearing and graffiti. But we are committed to bring that number down to zero.

Let me be clear — in Kosovo we have a shared endeavour, one that unites us in a common cause to safeguard and strengthen our collective future. As we navigate the path forward, we want to continue to build bridges and advance together towards a brighter tomorrow, one that not only fulfils our aspirations but also secures the well-being of all of our citizens and communities.

In our efforts to advance the rights of every community and, in this case, the Serb minority community, I confirm that we are willing to do even more for the Serbs in Kosovo, but we will not give Serbia instruments through which they can destroy the lives of Serbs who live in Kosovo and try to continuously diminish our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Kosovo, once a symbol of suffering because of the genocidal war waged by Milošević, has emerged today as a shining example of democracy in the Western Balkans and beyond. Its remarkable journey has been recognized by international reports and publications, showcasing the incredible strides the country has taken.

With a vibrant civil society, a flourishing economy and a resilient population, Kosovo stands as a testament to the transformative power of determination and the pursuit of democratic ideals. It is a story of resilience and hope that proves that even in the most challenging circumstances, the ideals of democracy can be ignited and can flourish.

International reports and publications have consistently highlighted Kosovo's remarkable democratic progress. Our commitment to human rights, the rule of law and good governance has garnered well-deserved praise, with many observers, such as Transparency International, the World Justice Project, the Freedom House, the World Press Freedom Index and the V-Dem Institute lauding Kosovo as a model for other countries of the region. Kosovo stands out today for its remarkable progress in the fight against corruption and for the rule of law, media freedom, political freedom and civil rights, as well as democratic elections. Obviously, those international organizations are showcasing the truth and not the propaganda that we heard from Serbia today.

As the youngest democracy in the Western Balkans, Kosovo has embraced its State-building journey with an unparalleled dedication to fostering an inclusive, transparent and participatory democracy. Its successful endeavours in building strong democratic foundations are an inspiration to the entire region and a symbol of

what can be achieved when the pursuit of democracy takes centre stage. In the face of any challenge, our people's resolve remains unshaken. We understand and cherish profoundly the value of our democracy and our independence, and we are fiercely proud of our State-building journey — a path marked by unwavering determination and sacrifice.

Serbia constantly pretends that it has the authority to interpret international law. We all know that it does not. The final authority to do so lies with the International Court of Justice, which has unequivocally found that Kosovo's declaration of independence has not violated any applicable rule of international law. I would add that the Court's opinion was requested by Serbia itself — yet they not only continue to deny it but also violate it through their constant acts of aggression.

Given that today we are led by the Brazilian presidency of the Security Council, I would like to honour the memory and legacy of one of the greatest minds of international public law and international human rights law and a former Judge of the International Court of Justice, the late Judge Cançado Trindade of Brazil. In his separate opinion in support of the Court's advisory opinion on *Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo*, he said:

“No State can invoke territorial integrity in order to commit atrocities ... nor perpetrate them on the assumption of State sovereignty, nor commit atrocities and then rely on a claim of territorial integrity notwithstanding the sentiments and ineluctable resentments of the ‘people’ ... victimized. What has happened in Kosovo is that the victimized ‘people’ ... has sought independence, in reaction against systematic and long-lasting terror and oppression, perpetrated in flagrant breach of the fundamental principle of equality and non-discrimination. The basic lesson is clear: no State can use territory to destroy the population. Such atrocities amount to an absurd reversal of the ends of the State, which was created and exists for human beings, and not vice-versa.” (A/64/881/Add.1, *separate opinion of Judge A. A. Cançado Trindade*, para. 176)

He ends his opinion with the following:

“States transformed into machines of oppression and destruction ceased to be States in the eyes of their victimized population. Thrown into lawlessness, their victims sought refuge and

survival elsewhere, in the *jus gentium*, in the law of nations, and, in our times, in the *Law of the United Nations*. I dare to nourish the hope that the conclusion of the present advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice may conform the closing chapter of yet another long episode of the timeless saga of the human kind in search of emancipation from tyranny and systematic oppression.” (*ibid.*, para. 240)

We all had the hopes of Judge Cançado Trindade. Unfortunately, as long as there are dictators who search for more territory rather than care about their people, we will continue to face the challenges of tyranny.

In the face of such challenges, we should never fall into the trap of “bothsidesism”. We are witnessing a tendency to apply the principle of “bothsidesism” when confronted with complex issues. That approach aims to appear balanced and impartial by giving equal weight to opposing perspectives. However, it also more often than not risks leading to a fallacy that undermines the very essence of democracy.

When we fail to unequivocally call evil by its true name, we risk creating space for a moral equivalence between right and wrong and between virtue and vice. That approach obscures the fundamental values and principles upon which democracies are built, namely, justice, human rights and the rule of law. In doing so, it opens the door to manipulation and deceit by authoritarian regimes, who exploit the reluctance to take a strong, principled stand against their actions. We have seen it in our part of the world, and we are seeing it in Ukraine. Authoritarians exploit the grey areas created by “bothsidesism”, using it as a tool to sow confusion and weaken democratic institutions.

In the face of an ever-growing bond among the world’s autocrats, democracies must stand firm in their principles and values, for that is the only way to preserve their resilience and protect democratic freedoms. In the face of such hybrid actions through the act of aggression by Serbia, we ask our international partners for strategic clarity and determined actions to prevent acts of aggression by Serbia from ever happening again.

In a resounding call for peace and security, our plea is clear and unyielding: Kosovo needs substantial security guarantees within the Euro-Atlantic security framework. As we move forward, we should focus on halting Serbia’s support for terrorist activities against Kosovo, urging it to cooperate in the investigation of the

recent terrorist attack and hand over to us the terrorists involved. Moreover, we must increase security around Kosovo’s border with Serbia and adopt clear measures against Serbia’s leadership as a deterrence.

A resolute message at this point would underscore a commitment to safeguarding peace and security throughout the region, and also on the entire European continent. Most importantly, it would showcase that the democratic world does not stand idle in the face of autocratic and hegemonic regimes. As President Biden recently said, history has taught us that, when terrorists do not pay a price for their terror and dictators do not pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos, more death and more destruction. They keep going, and the cost and the threats to the rest of the world keep rising.

We must not let propaganda win. We must fight for the truth. There is only one truth that can be evidenced: that Kosovo has been a victim of an act of aggression by Serbia; that Serbia is terrorizing the Serbs who live in Kosovo for the sake of stopping their integration within Kosovan institutions and society; that Serbia wants Kosovo’s territory, which they will never get; that Kosovo is the constructive party in the dialogue, with a track record of implementing the vast majority of its undertakings, while Serbia’s list of non-implementation is so long that it would take us many hours to go through it; that we want the full and swift implementation of the entirety of the Brussels Agreement of 27 February in a fair and balanced way, but while we were committed to peaceful talks with Serbia, it resorted to the use of force; that we want justice and accountability, while Serbia wants denial and impunity; and that we want peace, and unfortunately Serbia showed on 24 September that it wants war. But we will not let them have it.

As we all know, democracy and freedom always prevail. That is because nothing can stand in the way of a freedom-loving nation. No matter how high the hurdles, no matter how thorny the road and no matter how painful the sacrifice, the people of Kosovo will never, ever give up on their freedom.

The President: I thank Ms. Osmani-Sadriu for her briefing.

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

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim

Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for her briefing. The presence of Prime Minister Brnabić and President Osmani-Sadriu at today's meeting attests to its importance.

The close relations between the Western Balkans region and Switzerland draw their strength from both a shared history of more than 30 years and a present marked by strong personal ties. We are therefore all the more committed to the stability and prosperity of the region, and we support the European perspective of Kosovo and Serbia.

The path towards a normalized and prosperous relationship between Kosovo and Serbia lies in three stages: de-escalation, a political solution and trust-building, including by addressing the past.

De-escalation is urgent. Since our previous meeting six months ago (see S/PV.9312), uncertainty and tensions between Kosovo and Serbia have continued to grow. At the end of May, more than 90 Kosovo Force (KFOR) soldiers were injured during protests. A new level of violence was reached with the attack on 24 September, which claimed the life of a Kosovar policeman and once again resulted in several injuries. Switzerland condemns those acts of violence and calls on Serbia and Kosovo to restore calm. All stakeholders should refrain from using or promoting violence and from unilateral and provocative actions such as deploying troops near the border. Inflammatory rhetoric must give way to constructive behaviour in order to implement political solutions. The leaders involved must set an example. They are responsible for their actions and for the language they use. We also call on all actors to cooperate fully with the investigation of the attack of 24 September so that its perpetrators can be brought to justice. We welcome the close cooperation between the Kosovo police, as the first responders, and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and KFOR, and reiterate our support for KFOR as one of the main guarantors of security.

Switzerland calls on the parties to engage fully in the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU) and to implement their commitments under the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The Agreement represents the way forward in overcoming differences and establishing more peaceful relations. In support of the EU-led normalization process, Switzerland has offered an informal framework in which high-level

representatives of political parties from both countries can discuss concrete steps towards normalization. We therefore welcomed the important discussions that took place this weekend and hope they will lead to tangible progress. We also reiterate that the participation of women and the integration of a gender perspective must be guaranteed throughout the process. It will be crucial to establish a climate of trust both between the parties to the dialogue and between the communities in Kosovo. An important step in that direction is dealing with the past, and that must benefit all communities, including the most marginalized, such as the Roma. We welcomed the May declaration on missing persons and actively support the search for and identification of missing persons. We are also encouraged by efforts to ensure that people who have suffered conflict-related sexual violence are able to live their lives with dignity, and we continue to support those efforts.

The concerns of all the inhabitants of Kosovo must be addressed if lasting stability is to be achieved. Switzerland is grateful to UNMIK for the work it has accomplished and remains ready for constructive discussion of a possible strategic review of UNMIK. Building on our close relations, Switzerland continues to support Kosovo in its efforts to strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights, taking into account the interests of all communities. The future of the Western Balkans lies in peaceful, multi-ethnic and prosperous societies, and we will remain committed to that path.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the presence at today's meeting of Her Excellency Ms. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of Serbia, and her statement on Serbia's position. I also listened carefully to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh's briefing and Ms. Osmani-Sadriu's remarks.

China's position on the issue of Kosovo is consistent and clear. We support the parties concerned in reaching a mutually acceptable solution to the issue within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999), through dialogue and consultation. Serbia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity should be fully respected in that process, and there should be no double standards on that important issue. In connection with the briefing we just heard, I would like to highlight four points.

First, for some time now, the situation in northern Kosovo has remained volatile, with a high incidence of violent security incidents, which is cause for deep

concern. We oppose the unilateral actions of the Kosovo authorities, which have raised tensions and worsened the confrontation, and call on them to get back on the right track, that of dialogue and consultation. The NATO Kosovo Force should ensure that it respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country concerned and acts in a way that is genuinely conducive to regional peace and stability.

Secondly, unity and mutual trust among the communities in Kosovo have always been fragile. Municipal institutions lacking Serb representation are not conducive to the harmonious coexistence of the various ethnic groups and do not serve the fundamental interests or meet the development needs of the local people. We call on the Kosovo authorities to take positive measures to reduce ethnic tensions and effectively respect and guarantee the legitimate rights of all communities.

Thirdly, since the beginning of this year, Serbia and Kosovo have held a number of high-level meetings, with the facilitation of the European Union (EU), to discuss the political settlement of the Kosovo issue. We look forward to seeing results from that engagement and discussion as soon as possible, and China appreciates the mediation efforts of the EU in that regard. The establishment of the community of Serb municipalities is an important component of the Brussels Agreement. The Kosovo authorities should uphold their commitments effectively by fulfilling their obligations as soon as possible and taking practical action to remove obstacles to the process of dialogue between the two sides.

Fourthly, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) plays an important role in stabilizing the situation in Kosovo and promoting national reconciliation. The United Nations and the Security Council should remain seized of and maintain input on the issue, ensure that UNMIK is delivering fully on its mandate and support Special Representative Ziadeh in the conduct of her work. The Kosovo authorities should work to effectively ensure respect for UNMIK personnel and premises, guarantee their security and facilitate the smooth operation of the Mission.

More than two decades ago, Kosovo went through a tragic war, while more than 100 years ago events in the Balkans changed the course of history. We should never allow such tragedies to be repeated. The world

is already in chaos, and Kosovo should not add to it. The international community should work together to maintain security and stability in Kosovo and peace and security in the Balkans, promote the peaceful coexistence of the two communities and strengthened dialogue and engagement between them, and contribute to reaching a political settlement of the relevant issues. China is ready to work with all the parties concerned to continue to make efforts and contributions to that end.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome the presence of Her Excellency Ms. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of Serbia, and thank Special Representative Caroline Ziadeh for her report. We have also taken note of Ms. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu's statement.

The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/735) is not encouraging, considering that the last six months have been marked by various manifestations of discord between Belgrade and Pristina and by numerous security incidents, which have adversely affected the dialogue process and worsened the security situation on the ground. We condemn the violence in May and September in which civilians and NATO Kosovo Force members were injured. Ecuador calls on all the parties to show the greatest possible degree of responsibility in the conduct of their actions and to refrain from any action or rhetoric that could lead to an increase in tensions or stoke conflict.

Only this April, when the Council was considering this same issue (see S/PV.9312), the progress that had led to the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina and its implementing annex was praised. It is therefore regrettable to learn that despite the efforts made in the framework of the high-level meeting facilitated by the High Representative of the European Union in September, the parties have not reached a consensus on the sequencing modalities for the implementation of the Agreement or the de-escalation of tensions in the north of the region. As the Secretary-General underscored, to achieve viable and sustainable agreements, both parties must maintain an open, transparent and inclusive process that takes into account the various needs and expectations of all parties concerned, including women, young people and civil society actors.

People who are slaves of their past will never be owners of their future. It is therefore advisable for the parties to be committed to the European Union-facilitated dialogue so as to find a lasting

solution to the situation in the north of that region, which will smooth the path to the implementation of the agreement and its annex. That includes making progress in the work to establish an association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, as established in the Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, brokered more than 10 years ago. We also call for all necessary measures to be adopted to implement the declaration on missing persons. Determining their whereabouts is a priority and would contribute to the reconciliation process and to strengthening confidence-building measures.

Ecuador reiterates its support for a solution as stipulated in resolution 1244 (1999). We appreciate the commitment of Special Representative Ziadeh and the personnel of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to fostering dialogue and maintaining the stability of the region, alongside international partners. We urge them to continue to promote initiatives aimed at building trust and cooperation.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Ziadeh for her briefing. I wish to welcome President Osmani-Sadriu and Prime Minister Brnabic to today's meeting.

Let me first reiterate the commitment of the United States to maintaining stability in the Western Balkans. My Government strongly condemns the violence perpetrated by armed assailants on 24 September in the north of Kosovo, which led to the death of a Kosovo police officer. The 24 September attack revealed a direct threat to the safety of Kosovo's citizens and put at risk personnel of NATO and the European Union (EU). There must be full accountability in accordance with the rule of law for perpetrators of the attack. Individuals who fled to third countries should be extradited or prosecuted, as appropriate.

The United States is working closely with EU and NATO partners to help keep the north of Kosovo calm and deter escalatory measures by either party. We caution both sides against uncoordinated or escalatory actions and urge their immediate return to the EU-facilitated dialogue, prepared to take concrete steps forward. It is important that the parties make progress in implementing all dialogue commitments.

The United States continues to support the EU-facilitated dialogue as the best path to reconcile issues between Kosovo and Serbia. We will remain closely

engaged in supporting our European partners' work in that regard. We also welcome the increased numbers and greater visibility of NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) in the north of Kosovo. That presence should be sustained as long as needed.

We commend the Kosovo police force for its response to the 24 September attack and for its close coordination with KFOR and the European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, both during the attack and during their investigations. We encourage Kosovo to continue coordination moving forward.

Recent events have once again shown that, while there is a role the United Nations can play in Kosovo, it does not require a Chapter VII mandate to do so. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was not involved in the response to, or the investigation of, the 24 September attack. UNMIK has long fulfilled its original purpose and no longer has a role in the governance of Kosovo or in its security. We again ask the Council to sunset the Mission.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh for her comprehensive briefing and welcome the participation of President Osmani-Sadriu and Prime Minister Brnabic in today's meeting.

Malta is deeply concerned about the recent developments in the north of Kosovo following last month's incidents. We condemn the terrorist attack against the Kosovo police that took place on 24 September and call for those responsible to be swiftly brought to justice and held accountable. Such acts of violence serve only to destabilize the situation and reverse the hard-earned progress achieved on the path towards the normalization of relations between both sides.

Malta is also concerned about the deployment of Serbian military forces at the border with Kosovo, which constitutes a further escalation of the situation. We welcome the fact that the number of troops has since been reduced and call on Serbia to cooperate fully in the ongoing investigation. Moving forward, we urge both sides to focus all efforts on de-escalating tensions and to refrain from any unilateral action or divisive rhetoric that could undermine the diplomatic efforts made during the past months. Dialogue is key in resolving outstanding issues, and collaboration is the only way to ensure peace and stability in the region.

Positive steps to create an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation, good-neighbourly relations and further dialogue are of the utmost importance at this juncture. The holding of local elections in the northern municipalities of Kosovo will be crucial, and we call on the full and unconditional participation of all players in the electoral process. Hate speech, the vilification of women in politics and physical and verbal attacks on journalists are unacceptable and deplorable.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Malta's full support for the European Union (EU) accession aspirations of Serbia and Kosovo. The path to membership for both parties runs through the EU-facilitated dialogue. It is crucial that both sides be committed to, and engage constructively in, realizing that goal. In that regard, we take full note of the progress achieved so far by Kosovo in its reform path and stress the importance of undertaking the process with the full participation of various stakeholders from within civil society, including vulnerable and marginalized communities. Malta also acknowledges the importance of the role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in promoting security, stability and the preservation and promotion of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and young people in Kosovo.

The normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia will not only foster peace in the area but also lead to economic and social prosperity in the Western Balkans. Therefore, we stress the importance of both parties respecting the agreement on the path to the normalization between Kosovo and Serbia, which was agreed by both parties earlier this year, and we urge them to fulfil their respective obligations under it.

In conclusion, Malta reaffirms its support for UNMIK in its efforts to engage all communities in Kosovo, as well as regional and international actors, proactively and constructively. We urge Kosovo and Serbia to prioritize dialogue over confrontation and augur that the coming period will be marked with meaningful progress in the efforts to normalize relations.

Mrs. Broadhurst-Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, for her briefing, and I welcome to today's meeting the Prime Minister of Serbia, Ms. Ana Brnabić, and the President of Kosovo, Ms. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu.

Today's meeting is being held against a worrisome backdrop. The political and security situation is deteriorating in northern Kosovo and incidents have occurred over the past six months, some of which have affected members of the Kosovo Force. The events that took place on 24 September are just the most recent example of the situation. France strongly condemns the unacceptable attack on the Kosovo police force, which led to the death of one of its officers. France expects that the circumstances surrounding this attack will be fully clarified and that those responsible will be brought to justice. We call on the parties to show restraint and to make the necessary efforts to calm the situation.

The rise in tension cannot be dissociated from the political dimension of the issue. The Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2023/735) that little progress has been made in implementing the Brussels-Ohrid agreements, which were reached thanks to the mediation efforts of the European Union. We deplore this situation. The current context calls for both Serbia and Kosovo to return rapidly and unconditionally to the European Union-facilitated dialogue to normalize their relations. It is crucial to opt for dialogue and compromise. We expect the parties to commit themselves unreservedly, in a spirit of responsibility and — I repeat — compromise, to implementing all the commitments set out in the agreements reached. That includes the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo and the rapid organization of new inclusive elections in northern Kosovo in a calm climate and with the participation of Serbs. Those various processes are key to strengthening the European prospects of both countries. France remains fully committed to integrating the Western Balkans into the European Union as soon as possible.

We welcome the commitment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to lasting peace, through the actions carried out under its mandate to strengthen the rule of law, human rights, dialogue and reconciliation between the communities. Its actions for women and young people, which have achieved progress, are also welcome in that regard. We congratulate the Mission on its work to raise awareness of the problem of child marriage and its support for the return of refugees and displaced persons.

France remains fully committed to seeking a lasting normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. France will continue to work for rapid progress in that regard, in support of the dialogue facilitated by

the European Union and the efforts of UNMIK, the Kosovo Force and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. The dispute can be resolved only through peace, respect and dialogue.

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 a critical role in supporting Kosovo. Japan commends UNMIK staff for their commitment. And we thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh for her leadership and active engagement with local and international partners to promote mutual trust at the grassroots level, including for the multi-ethnic events.

We express our serious concern over the growing tensions in the north of Kosovo. We call on both parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from taking unilateral actions that could lead to further escalation. Japan strongly condemns the series of violent acts, especially the Banjska attacks in late September. The perpetrators must be held accountable via an impartial investigation.

The security situation in the north of Kosovo needs to be stabilized to avoid a new crisis on the ground. We therefore welcome the recent decision to bring reinforcements to the Kosovo Force, which continues to play an important role for stability and security in Kosovo. Securing the environment for Serbs returning to join the Kosovo police and Kosovo institutions will be helpful.

Japan strongly urges both parties to recommit to engaging in the European Union-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, which is essential to peace and stability in the Western Balkans. We call on them to fully implement swiftly and in good faith their respective obligations under the agreements achieved in the dialogue to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

As mentioned earlier, UNMIK continues to make meaningful efforts aimed at confidence-building in the region. We also recognize that the situation in Kosovo is very different from when UNMIK was established in 1999. Therefore, UNMIK's role should be reviewed in order to adapt it to the current situation.

Japan stands ready to work with all stakeholders to achieve peace, stability and reconciliation in the region.

Mr. Bastaki (United Arab Emirates): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadeh for her valuable briefing today. I welcome the participation of Prime Minister Brnabić and President Osmani-Sadriu in today's meeting.

When the Council most recently met to discuss this file in April (see S/PV.9312), there was hope for greater stability and prosperity in the region. Indeed, in that meeting, the United Arab Emirates stated,

“[t]he recent agreement between Serbia and Kosovo is the most significant breakthrough in relations between both States in over a decade”(S/PV.9312, *p.18*).

The conversations about the future of both countries and their relationship with one another had notably shifted, leading to the Ohrid and Brussels agreements, facilitated by the European Union (EU). Those landmark agreements offered the promise of a new chapter for the peoples of both countries. They were followed by the joint declaration on missing persons, which was endorsed in May. Yet throughout this year, the situation on the ground in northern Kosovo began to fray.

Following a difficult election period, violence erupted in late May, during which dozens of Kosovo Force peacekeepers, as well as law enforcement officials and civilians, were wounded. We condemn all attacks against peacekeepers. And there was a collective feeling of fear and uncertainty when the world witnessed the events of 24 September, during which a policeman was killed and others wounded. The United Arab Emirates condemns attacks on law enforcement officials and shares its condolences with the families of those killed and injured. The rule of law must prevail, and all those responsible must be held to account. What took place one month ago risked pulling the region back to a darker time in its history.

Following those events, as we saw leaders work to de-escalate the situation, we were reminded that peace is not simply the passive absence of fighting, but also the culmination of concerted action. Dialogue and diplomacy take courage, and we commend the steps taken by the leadership of Kosovo and Serbia to de-escalate the situation. At the same time, momentum must continue in the implementation of the agreements

made under the auspices of the EU-facilitated dialogue. The United Arab Emirates reiterates its full support for the dialogue, which remains the best means of resolving outstanding issues. In that regard, we welcome the recent high-level meetings that took place as part of the EU-facilitated dialogue. Now it is more important than ever for both sides to re-focus on constructive dialogue and avoid those who would engage in inflammatory rhetoric which will only exacerbate tensions.

Any hope for peace in the future requires building trust. In the light of that, we appreciate and encourage the continued efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo at building confidence and trust between communities in Kosovo, in coordination with the Government and community leaders.

As this is the last statement of the United Arab Emirates on this file during its Security Council term, let me reiterate that, for its part, the United Arab Emirates remains fully committed to supporting all concerted efforts towards peace and prosperity for the peoples of Serbia and Kosovo.

Mrs. Onanga (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, for her informative briefing. I welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Ms. Ana Brnabić, and the President of Kosovo, Ms. Osmani-Sadriu.

Since our meeting in April (see S/PV.9312), the situation in Kosovo has hardly improved. Tensions, clashes and numerous outbreaks of violence, many involving elements of the Kosovo police, have raised fears of a conflagration.

The daily lives of the people of the various communities are still all too often marked by scuffles and clashes, which have led to the deployment of an additional NATO battalion and a multinational battalion of reserve forces to contain the situation. It is clear, though, that if the causes of those recurrent episodes of violence persist, de-escalation will remain elusive and security will remain a pipe dream.

The consequences of the mass resignation of thousands of Kosovo Serbs from local institutions, as well as the boycott of the municipal elections held in December 2022 in the north, require a lasting solution through the law in order to restore confidence and

promote peaceful coexistence. In that regard, the statute for establishing a community of Kosovo Serb municipalities is crucial. We call on the Pristina authorities to implement the 2013 Brussels Agreement, which would be a decisive step towards normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina. My country regrets that the parties were unable to agree on the draft statute for the establishment of the community of municipalities that was submitted at the beginning of May, and that the various attempts to resume a dialogue failed to make progress. We recognize the important role played by the European Union (EU) and other regional and bilateral actors, and urge them to continue to work to overcome the remaining misunderstandings and barriers and forge a consensus with a view to continuing the negotiations. In that regard, we call on the parties to consider the nine-point plan of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with a view to breaking the political deadlock.

In terms of confidence-building efforts and mechanisms, we welcomed the launch of the Barabar Centre with the support of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. We also welcome the extensive and multifaceted work that the Mission is doing in the areas of justice, human rights, the arts, economic integration and ecology for young people, women and minority communities. That commitment to strengthening the rights of non-majority communities, women and young people, especially through the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda on the one hand and the youth and peace and security agenda on the other, is a vital contribution towards building lasting peace and peaceful coexistence for all communities. And in the context of Kosovo, we know that an essential part of achieving that peace is by achieving peace among the communities. To do that, the parties must combat hate speech, stigmatization, marginalization and violence of all kinds and refrain from unilateral actions or giving into faits accomplis that undermine political efforts. In the same vein, violence and attacks targeting religious symbols must cease, and solutions for returning must be offered to the thousands of people from non-majority communities who have been displaced inside Kosovo or have taken refuge outside the country. We support the work that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is doing in that area and take note of the latest voluntary returns recorded.

Belgrade's endorsement of the joint declaration on missing persons is a welcome development. The parties must ensure its effective implementation while respecting the dignity and beliefs of every community. We also take note of the continuing investigation of cases relating to war crimes in connection with the Kosovo war, which is a crucial component in the efforts to ensure truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition, and for the establishment of peace, which we believe is intrinsically dependent on good justice. In the search for solutions, it will be vital to use the relevant resolutions of the Security Council as benchmarks, especially resolution 1244 (1999), as well as to ensure respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, particularly the territorial integrity of States.

On the political front, we need to find a way to overcome the current deadlock and ease the tensions that have been steadily increasing in recent months as a result of violence, particularly police violence. We have taken note of the willingness expressed by the Kosovo authorities to organize early municipal elections in the north. My country encourages Belgrade and Pristina to continue to engage in good-faith dialogue. We have taken note of the 27 February agreement on the path to normalization.

In conclusion, my country encourages the parties to sustain their dialogue in order to find a political solution through negotiations. The EU and regional and subregional organizations, as well as bilateral partners, with the Quint in the lead, must also maintain their engagement at the highest level with a view to defusing tensions and enabling progress that is mutually satisfactory to the parties.

Ms. Oppong-Ntiri (Ghana): I would like to welcome the participation in today's meeting of Ms. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia. We thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2023/735) on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and we are also grateful to Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIK, for her important briefing and continued leadership of the United Nations efforts in the Kosovo region. My delegation also takes note of Ms. Osmani-Sadriu's remarks.

At the outset, let me reiterate Ghana's continuing support for UNMIK's mandate. Given the political conditions that persist in the region, the role of UNMIK

in promoting security, stability and respect for human rights remains vital. We also welcome UNMIK-led initiatives on trust-building, social cohesion and enhanced intercommunal engagement. We note and urge further support for UNMIK's engagement with women and young people aimed at enhancing their role in peacebuilding and supporting resilience-building measures at the community level. The decision to integrate the women and peace and security agenda and incorporate gender perspectives into the normalization process can enhance the chances of restoring peace, stability and economic growth in the region. However, we have noted with concern the violations committed against UNMIK offices and reiterate the inviolability of the Mission's premises and assets. We urge for taking every measure necessary to ensure that its operations are unimpeded.

On the political front, we note with concern the persisting tensions hindering the further implementation of the normalization agreement of 27 February and its implementation annex of 18 March. We continue to believe that the agreement offers a renewed opportunity for achieving a comprehensive normalization of relations between Serbia and the Kosovo region, which is essential to long-term peace, security and prosperity in the Balkans. In welcoming the establishment of a joint monitoring committee for the agreement as an important step, we therefore believe that further efforts are needed to operationalize it and to advance normalization between the two sides. In that regard, we appreciate the sustained support of the European Union and urge for continuing efforts to resolve the concerns surrounding sequencing modalities, which have stalled progress.

My delegation firmly believes that dialogue and diplomacy offer the best chances for resolving the long-standing dispute between the Kosovo region and Serbia, and in that regard, we welcome the role of regional actors in support of de-escalation. We urge all authorities to refrain from unilateral actions and inflammatory rhetoric, which in some instances have resulted in violent clashes, leading to needless civilian casualties. The parties must continue to remain committed to dialogue in good faith with the aim of reaching mutually agreed pathways for achieving the objectives of normalization and peaceful coexistence.

We continue to be concerned about the persisting tensions in northern Kosovo. The tensions and violent escalations reported by the Secretary-General are

emblematic of a deeply divided society. We therefore call for stepping up confidence- and trust-building efforts to help assuage the deep-seated grievances that stand in the way of reason and mutual cooperation. Our delegation has also consistently advocated for ensuring that the issue of missing persons is not politicized, and we welcome the understanding reached by both sides to address the issue as a humanitarian concern. We believe that approach is essential if we are to see accelerated efforts to uncover the facts about the 1,600 missing persons who are still unaccounted for after 25 years.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm the importance of United Nations efforts in support of a comprehensive and lasting solution to this decades-long problem. We also reiterate the need for all peace efforts in the Kosovo region to be based on the principles of international law and the values of the United Nations. We reiterate once again that all sides must demonstrate an unprecedented level of commitment and good faith in the normalization process. Greater efforts are certainly required for the full and effective implementation of the European Union-facilitated agreements reached in Ohrid and Brussels and earlier commitments in the wider interest of the people and the Balkan region.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziakeh, for her important briefing and update on the situation in Kosovo.

We welcome, in this Chamber, the participation of Ms. Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia.

Mozambique welcomes and encourages the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), particularly by actively working with partners to sustain peace and supporting several initiatives, including the promotion of security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo and the region. We note that, despite the numerous challenges, UNMIK continues its constructive engagement with Kosovo, Serbia and regional and international actors, facilitated by the European Union. We commend the efforts aimed at normalizing relations between Serbia and Kosovo and creating a conducive environment for achieving regional peace and stability. In that context, we strongly urge national, regional and international partners to do their utmost to preserve the progress achieved over the years towards achieving peace and reconciliation in Kosovo, in line with resolution 1244 (1999).

Despite the enormous efforts being made on the ground, which were aptly detailed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in her briefing, we remain concerned about the discord and tension between the Belgrade and Pristina authorities. That is contributing to the deterioration of the security situation, which is characterized by violence, provocations, arrests and protests involving civilians, journalists and members of the Kosovo forces. The security incidents in the region have the potential to jeopardize the implementation of the Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations and are a threat to the peace, stability and security that we want to see prevail in the region. The situation is also being aggravated by tensions between the two sides, with each side accusing the other of non-compliance with the agreement. We strongly reiterate our call on both the Serbian and Kosovar sides to lay down the necessary foundations for genuine dialogue, aimed at promoting reconciliation between their respective communities, and to refrain from acts that instigate violence and tensions so that mutual trust can be built.

We call on the parties and all relevant actors to continue to remain engaged in the promotion of constructive dialogue in Kosovo. That is key to the successful implementation of the Brussels Agreement, facilitated by the European Union. It is crucial to continue supporting the ongoing efforts to strengthen dialogue between the parties. We urge that any military incidents or confrontation be avoided. Should any occur, they must be investigated in an impartial and transparent manner and those responsible should be held accountable. That will foster a better and credible political process. The inclusion of all stakeholders, such as women, young people and civil society, is extremely important to promote peace, not only in Kosovo but also the region. Mozambique reiterates its support for the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and all efforts by regional actors aimed at finding peace and stability in Kosovo and the region.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziakeh, for her briefing on the situation in the province and for the insights she provided. We welcome the participation of Prime Minister Ana Brnabić of Serbia. We have heard the views of Ms. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu. We were particularly amused by her insistent but — as was

previously the case — clumsy attempts to implicate Russia in current events in Kosovo. Her attempts to present Kosovo as a beacon and model of democracy against the gloomy background of surrounding autocracies is worthy of sarcasm.

During the six months since the previous Security Council meeting on Kosovo (see S/PV.9312), the situation in the province has significantly deteriorated. The reason for that remains the same: the aspirations of the so-called Pristina authorities to establish full control over the Serb-populated northern part of the province. In April, Pristina installed its proxies in four non-Albanian municipalities through staged elections that were boycotted by the Serb population. Despite the meagre 3.47 per cent turnout owing to the Albanian minority in those municipalities, the United States and the European Union (EU) acknowledged the elections as valid. As a direct consequence, the new so-called mayors, with the support of Kosovo special forces, took control of administrative buildings, which led to the serious surge in violence that occurred at the end of May. We are particularly concerned about the fact that, on that occasion, the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) acted in concert with Kosovo Albanian security forces. KFOR personnel attempted to disperse the Kosovo Serbs who were peacefully protesting outside the Zvečan municipal administration building on 29 May. Kosovo Albanians took advantage of the situation by opening fire on civilians with automatic rifles. Dozens of people were injured on both sides, although by sheer luck there were no fatal casualties.

The West paid lip service to condemning Albin Kurti's "overreach" and approved certain disciplinary measures. However, they are merely superficial. The reality in the north of Kosovo has become very harsh. There are almost daily acts of intimidation, arrests of Serbs and attacks on people and their property. Since the ultranationalist Movement for Self-Determination party came to power in 2021, there have been at least 420 — and now even more — ethnically motivated attacks on Serbs. The barbaric burning of homes that belong to refugees returning to the province is particularly shocking. In recent months, there have been at least two such incidents. The dispute over the Visoki Dečani monastery, which has groundlessly been denied its claim to its surrounding property, remains unresolved. The arbitrary appropriation of Serbian-owned land in the north of the province to establish Kosovo police strongholds has also continued.

Currently, the northern parts of Kosovo are under a de facto blockade. The ban on the import of goods from central Serbia is leading to a humanitarian disaster. There are not enough vaccines for children, including newborns and medicine for oncology and other patients. Oxygen supplies at the Kosovo Mitrovica Hospital are running low, as the Prime Minister of Serbia mentioned.

All that presents Pristina in an unflattering light. The incident that happened on 24 September in the north of the province in Banjska is being widely discussed in order to divert attention and to place responsibility for everything that is happening on Belgrade. As a result of that incident, three local Serbs and a Kosovo Albanian police officer died as well. We have many questions about what happened. First, it is not clear why the international presence held back. Previously, in similar situations European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo patrols and Kosovo Force units immediately headed to the zones of tension to separate fighting sides and launch a negotiation process. This time, the situation was completely handed over to the Kosovo Albanians, which led to this tragic outcome. It is also noteworthy that, on the day of the incident, the West decided not to wait for the initial results of the investigation and immediately qualified the events as an egregious and heinous act of terrorism. The Kosovo Albanians spread disinformation that their "police officer" was allegedly shot by Serbs supported by Belgrade. Later, they were forced to recognize that the deaths were caused by the detonation of an explosive device. At the same time, Serbs who had stopped resisting were not killed in crossfire; they were shot at point-blank range.

Essentially, what we are seeing here are attempts to slander Belgrade. Such attempts are dangerous because Pristina is using *carte blanche* to step up the repression of the Serb population in the province. We are convinced that, if that arbitrariness does not end, the consequences will be extremely terrible and may mean the return of armed conflict. The tendency towards open confrontation is also shown by the illegitimate reorganization of the Pristina "security forces" into a quasi-army, their provision with modern weapons and military hardware and the training of Kosovo Albanian personnel at the American military base at Camp Bondsteel, which was originally intended for exactly the opposite — peacekeeping. Those steps are being taken in flagrant violation of resolution 1244 (1999), but Western weapons donors prefer not to think about that.

In that context, Pristina's declaration of the continuity between the police and the Kosovo Liberation Army is also revealing considering that the leaders of this terrorist organization, including Hashim Thaçi, are accused of serious war crimes in a case before a special court in The Hague. We trust that that institution will not repeat the errors of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and that all those found guilty will be duly punished. In that context, the refusal of Pristina to pay compensation to the victims of crimes committed by fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army, running counter to the decisions of the court in The Hague, speaks volumes. Western pandering only stokes the "greater Albanian" ambitions of quasi-Prime Minister Albin Kurti, which go far beyond the province's borders. He is trying to destabilize the Muslim-populated areas of central Serbia and is encouraging a centrifugal sentiment in North Macedonia. The maps of greater Albania in circulation also affect the territorial integrity of Montenegro and Greece.

We draw your attention, Mr. President, to the fact that, in these circumstances, Western countries are trampling the international legal foundation for a resolution. Mediators from Washington and the EU clumsily present one-sided schemes for a successful compromise that infringe upon the rights of Serbs. The much-vaunted agreement on the path to normalization scorns the inherent interests of Serbia and calls on it to recognize the sovereignty of Kosovo. In addition to all of that, it is presented as if resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels Agreement did not exist and that the process of normalization started only with the verbal agreements of February and March of this year.

At the same time, the province's application to the Council of Europe is being promoted. And Kosovars have also been promised that, from 1 January 2024, the EU Visa Liberalization Scheme will enter into force. It is clear that the absolute indulgence of Albin Kurti by his mentors allowed him to sabotage with impunity the unconditional obligation to create a community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo. In Pristina, they say that the community of Serb municipalities is allegedly dead. However, at the same time they are calling for the drafting of the statute of that community to be led by Washington, which is categorically against the granting of any executive powers to Serbs in Kosovo. In that connection, we would like to underscore that, until a community of Serb municipalities is created in its original form, talking about security for the Serb population in the province is not possible and a lasting, sustainable resolution to all of this is inconceivable.

Initial steps aimed at de-escalation should focus on the withdrawal of the so-called special Kosovo Albanian forces from the north of the province and the dismantling of their bases and posts. It is also important for the Kosovo Force to return to its mandate, which is clearly set forth in resolution 1244 (1999). There is no alternative to international legal parameters to find a stable and fair solution to the Kosovo issue established on that fundamental document. It should be acceptable to Belgrade and approved by the Security Council.

The work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is still greatly needed, and we should preserve its staff and financial capacity. We draw attention to the fact that the Kosovo Albanians complicit in the detention on 28 May 2019 of UNMIK staff member Mikhail Krasnoshchenkov, during which he sustained serious injury, have not been brought to justice. On 31 December 2021, another UNMIK staff member, Mr. Antonov, was unlawfully declared persona non grata by the province's "authorities". Without an adequate response, those kinds of steps can be taken against any United Nations personnel in other corners of the world. It is only a question of time. Attempts to remove the Kosovo file from the Security Council agenda are unacceptable. We recall some of our colleagues trying to convince the Council that nothing serious is happening in Kosovo, that the situation there is not a question of peace and security and that thematic Council meetings should be held only once a year rather than twice. We are well aware of how events unfolded in the province in September. Given the current circumstances, regular discussion of the situation in Kosovo should remain on the Council's agenda.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me welcome the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Ms. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Ms. Ana Brnabić, to this meeting. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh for her detailed briefing.

Let me start with some good news, despite a somewhat blurred horizon during the past months. In January of next year, the people of Kosovo will, like every other nation on the continent, enjoy freedom of movement in the Schengen area, a long-overdue process. Visa liberalization and increased human mobility have proven to have a huge transformative power everywhere they have been applied. That is part of the rapprochement with the freedoms of the European

Union (EU) and its core values, which Kosova, a functioning and ever-strengthening democracy, has fully embraced.

When we speak about the still-unresolved relations between Kosova and Serbia, and after the divergent views that we heard here from some speakers, it is always important to put things in their right context. In a not-too-distant past, Kosova and Serbia were part of an ensemble that no longer exists. The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia was cruel and brutal. The Kosova chapter of that dissolution, in 1999, had nothing in common with a difficult divorce. We witnessed the worst in the separation of Kosova and Serbia, with war crimes and crimes against humanity, the death of countless civilians that mass graves continue to reveal to this day and through mass torture and widespread rape that can never be forgotten. It required an international intervention to stop atrocities and open a new page for the entire region. Needless to say, it has left behind bitter memories that are hard to erase, wounds that are not easy to heal and scars that are still visible, including as many as 1,600 persons still unaccounted for. It is undeniable that, in the course of the past two decades, the region has gone a long way to overcome the demons of the past. It has largely succeeded, but there is still a lot of work to do.

I was sincerely surprised, to say the least, in listening to the Prime Minister's analysis of the situation in Kosovo. I checked the title of the meeting to make sure that we were not by any twist of chance in a meeting about Syria. None of the three elements that Prime Minister Brnabić mentioned are reflected, as she said, in the report of Secretary-General (S/2023/735). None are mentioned in the report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and none are mentioned in the report of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, who all live and work in Kosovo. There may be problems and issues of course, like everywhere, in all our countries. That includes, for example, not wearing a seatbelt or turning right on the signal. But no one can, in full honesty, deny that there are laws — modern laws — that there are institutions — democratic institutions — and that there is due process equally for anyone in Kosova today.

No matter how hard we may try, we cannot undo the past and its miseries. But, despite everything, we must move on and be forward-looking, as President Osmani-Sadriu said, turning pain to strength. That continues to be Albania's investment — not a fantasy, as we heard

from our Russian colleagues, like greater Albania or I do not know what. We do not want others' territory, like some do.

It is a fact that a quarter of a century later, the Western Balkans are no longer the Balkans; and balkanization has been replaced with Europeanization because the region has reconnected with its core identity, which is Europe. It is upon that conviction that I profoundly believe that despite the bitter past, the region has reached a transformative point when, in our part of Europe, like elsewhere in the continent, there is only talk of progress, cooperation, compromise, free movement and open spaces, connectivity with little or no borders — talk of a common destiny with far more positive prospects than worrisome aspects.

For the first time in our long and troubled history, there is a clear pathway to a common future, individually and collectively, which was once again confirmed in a very convincing and committed way last week in Tirana, during the tenth EU-Western Balkans Summit, in the framework of the Berlin process, the first ever organized outside the EU. We need to hold firm to it, not let it slip and not waste it precisely because if we do not, the demons of the past or any incomprehensible demons of the present may be tempted to jeopardize it.

Let me briefly share my worry, as well. It was mentioned that on 24 September Kosovo experienced what was thought inconceivable. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General called it a security incident. The European Parliament qualified it, in a resolution, as a terrorist act. A military commando carefully prepared and trained in Serbia, ready to fan the flames of the worst in the history of the Balkans, attacked Kosovo and its institutions, killing a police officer in the line of duty. Thanks to the prompt and professional intervention by the Kosovo police, the damage was contained, and the terrorist mob was quickly pushed back. The more we learn about it, the more difficult it becomes not to see a pattern between these events and the *déjà vu* elsewhere, remember the story of heavily armed men in help of a fabricated narrative of a discriminated minority.

The enterprise failed miserably — and that is the positive side — but its intentions remain frightening nonetheless — and that is the deeply worrisome side. There were no fighting sides in this incident, as we heard. There was a terrorist mob, on one side, and the police of an independent country preserving law

and order, on the other. That has to be clear. Critical questions regarding their plans, preparations, training, support and financing therefore need to be answered quickly and convincingly because explanations provided so far, including today, lack credibility, even more so when criminals who should have been immediately condemned, were speedily honoured.

The glorification of criminals, the denial of genocide and efforts to revisit history are wrong and unacceptable. They undermine the principles of justice, ethics and morality and have detrimental effects on the society of the countries concerned, as they run against reconciliation efforts.

A full and thorough investigation is therefore needed, as called for by many, including my country, and as requested in a recent resolution of the European Parliament, so that truth and responsibility are properly and clearly established, perpetrators held to account and no one thinks again to go down that slippery and dangerous slope.

This is the last meeting on this issue during our term in the Council. Next year will mark a quarter of a century since Kosovo and Serbia parted ways for good. They will never be under the same roof again, but they will always be neighbours, and we hope and are making efforts to ensure that they are good neighbours.

Reconciliation is always an arduous and complex process. It must rely on goodwill and vision, but also on accountability and justice. It may be fragile, especially knowing that extremists, surfing on populist narratives, may try to derail it.

In February last year, Kosovo and Serbia agreed to normalize relations through a binding agreement brokered by the EU, concluded in Ohrid and Brussels. While implementation has been slow, we welcome the establishment of a joint monitoring committee. It should be fully functioning. We also welcome the declaration on missing persons, a crucial process to bring closure to the pain of those concerned.

The agreement must be implemented, quickly and fully. Those who stand in the way of the process of the dialogue of normalization between Kosovo and Serbia must be resisted. Those who think that they can solve the issues through manipulation, threats and war games must be sanctioned. Those who want to gamble and hijack the future of Serbia and Kosovo as neighbours leaving in peace and cooperation, which impacts the entire region, must be held to account.

It is imperative to look forward, project forward and move forward. As we heard today from President Osmani-Sadriu, Kosovo is fully committed to implementing the agreement by walking the extra mile, in line with their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We expect Serbia to do the same and in good faith, for its own sake, that of the region and for the future we all need and want.

Let me end by quoting John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who said that “change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past are certain to miss the future”.

Too much time has been lost; too much precious time has been wasted. Failure to move on has a price that will be billed to the next generation. The EU-mediated dialogue is therefore a priceless opportunity that is to the detriment of no one and to the benefit of all: Kosovo, Serbia and the entire region.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Ziadeh for her briefing. I welcome the participation of Her Excellency Ms. Osmani-Sadriu, President of Kosovo, and Her Excellency Ms. Brnabić, Prime of Minister of Serbia, in our meeting.

The United Kingdom is a long-standing supporter of Kosovo as an independent and sovereign State. We welcome the Government's continued progress on important issues such as the rule of law, transitional justice and tackling organized crime and corruption.

We fully support the declaration on missing persons, endorsed by both Kosovo and Serbia. That is a priority issue and should not be politicized. We also echo the Mission's call for the Government of Kosovo to implement the 2016 ruling of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo regarding the Visoki Dečani monastery's property. That would send a positive signal to minority communities and demonstrate Kosovo's commitment to an inclusive, multi-ethnic future.

We also remain deeply concerned about the immediate security challenges in the north of Kosovo. We strongly condemn the attacks on international personnel in May, and on Kosovo police on 24 September. It is vital that those responsible are brought to justice. We call on Serbia to cooperate fully with the investigations under way and to take steps to address cross-border organized crime and arms smuggling.

Kosovo must be able to implement the rule of law across the whole of its territory, in close coordination with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in

Kosovo and the Kosovo Force (KFOR). We are proud to have deployed approximately 600 United Kingdom soldiers to Kosovo in response to a request from NATO in order to help fulfil KFOR's mandate to maintain a safe and secure environment in Kosovo.

At this time of heightened tension, the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia remains vital. We urge both parties to engage with the European Union-facilitated dialogue to find mutually acceptable solutions, end the cycle of instability and protect the hard-fought gains of the past decade.

We call on Kosovo and Serbia to honour their commitments and avoid unilateral actions or rhetoric that could reduce prospects for a comprehensive normalization agreement, and we urge both parties to engage constructively, including on the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities, as soon as possible.

Finally, we recognize the vital role that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has played in the significant progress Kosovo has made since the adoption of resolution 1244 (1999), but conditions on the ground are unrecognizable from 1999. We believe it is time to renew UNMIK's role and responsibilities. That would enable the Council to take a fresh look at how the Mission can adapt to serve the current conditions in Kosovo.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the United Kingdom's gratitude to the Special Representative and the Mission for all their work and for the professional implementation of their mandate.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Brazil.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziaideh, for her briefing. I also welcome the presence of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia and acknowledge the participation of Ms. Osmani-Sadriu.

We followed the events of recent weeks in the region with great concern. Once again, tensions between communities resulted in violence. We regret the deaths of four people near the Banjska Monastery on 24 September and hope that those involved will be held accountable for their actions. Brazil offers its solidarity to the families of the victims and those injured in the incident.

We believe that the current situation on the ground poses serious risks to regional stability, threatening important achievements in the course of the dialogue mediated by the European Union. We urge the parties to take all measures within their power to avoid further clashes and to exert their influence within their respective communities to urge moderation. We strongly encourage their leaders to demonstrate, by the example of their words, their willingness to maintain peace.

Rebuilding trust between the two sides will necessarily involve a solution to the representation crisis in northern Kosovo. Behind the boycott of local institutions and the April municipal elections, there are reasonable concerns that deserve respectful consideration and understanding. It is essential to call new municipal elections in order to restore the legitimacy of local institutions and representatives.

Brazil reiterates the call for the prompt establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo in accordance with the Brussels agreements, without preconditions or further delay. We encourage the parties to adhere to their commitments to respect sites of historical, cultural and religious significance and to preserve the freedom of movement.

Finally, we commend the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo for its role in preventing conflict and combating disinformation and hateful language. Brazil believes that the Mission continues to be an important instrument for preserving stability on the ground and for seeking a final and mutually acceptable settlement of the question.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The Prime Minister of Serbia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Brnabić (Serbia): I will immediately start by saying that it would probably take me a couple of hours to respond to what was said by Ms. Osmani-Sadriu, as well as by the Albanian Ambassador, but I will give a few examples that show the difference between words and actions.

We heard from Ms. Osmani-Sadriu that Kosovo is constructive and committed to dialogue. What we did not hear, though, is why Kosovo did not implement the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization

of Relations and establish the community of Serb-majority municipalities for more than 10 years. It has been more than 10 years — that is how constructive and committed they in fact are. Belgrade has done everything that was proclaimed by the Brussels Agreement. Pristina did not implement a single word. That is how constructive and committed they are.

Secondly, we all heard that Serbs enjoy veto rights. They do have veto rights — on paper. When the so-called Kosovo Parliament decided on the establishment of the Kosovo security forces, Serbs were supposed to vote — except they did not. The Kosovo security forces should not have been established, as Serbs did not vote. Yet the Kosovo security forces were nevertheless established. That is how the veto rights of Serbs work in practice.

We heard that Serbian Orthodox churches enjoy a high level of security, but let me be clear: we heard them referred to as Orthodox churches, not Serbian Orthodox churches. That is how respected and valued they are. The so-called President of the so-called Republic of Kosovo could not even utter the word Serbian. She said Orthodox churches, not Serbian Orthodox churches. However, they are in fact Serbian Orthodox churches. She cannot even say it.

Let me also clarify how well-protected Serbian Orthodox churches really are and the high level of security they supposedly enjoy.

First, Google the Visoki Dečani monastery. Do not trust me — Google Visoki Dečani. It is one of the most important monasteries for the Serbian Orthodox Church and for Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija. Among the first search results will be the inclusion of the Visoki Dečani monastery on the 2021 list of the seven most endangered heritage sites in Europe. That is how secure and protected sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church are. That comes from Europa Nostra, not Ana Brnabić or Serbia.

With regard to Visoki Dečani land ownership, in May 2016, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo confirmed the Visoki Dečani monastery's ownership of several hectares of land. Despite that legal decision, seven years later, the Court's decision has still not been implemented. The Visoki Dečani monastery is the only religious site in the world that has been under the constant protection of military forces — fully armed NATO Kosovo Force forces — for more than 20 years. That is how secure they are.

We then heard that Serbia is in fact terrorizing Serbs and Pristina is protecting them. I guess that is why 11 per cent of Serbs — or 2,000 Serbian families — have left Kosovo and Metohija since May this year alone. Where did they go? To central Serbia, which is supposedly terrorizing them. Where did they leave and who did they run away from? Those who were supposedly protecting them. Imagine, Serbia is terrorizing Serbs. That is, in all honesty, what we heard today.

Then we heard that Kosovo is a shining example of democracy and the rule of law. However, we did not hear how that same Kosovo came to be the world champion of the lowest number of returnees of all the post-conflict territories. It claims to be a fantastic, shining example. But with all that rule of law, security and veto rights, how come people are not going back? Because when they go back, they are arrested. How long do they stay in prison? No one knows. On average, it is 21 months — approximately two years. Is it happening in Syria? To be perfectly honest, I do not know. I am explaining what is happening in Kosovo and Metohija.

If I heard the Albanian Ambassador correctly, then it would turn out that 11-year-old Stefan Stojanović shot himself and that Azem Kurtaj probably helped him. Did he take him to hospital? No — in fact, Azem Kurtaj, who is a free man, shot an 11-year-old boy in the evening of Serbian Orthodox Christmas Day. That is how Serbs live in Kosovo and Metohija.

We then heard that Serbia wants Kosovo's territory and that Serbia considers itself the only one who can interpret international law. Well, let me say that, as we sit here in the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations recognizes the Republic of Serbia in its entirety, with the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija as part of the Republic of Serbia. This is where we sit — the home of the United Nations. Kosovo is not a member of the United Nations, and 80 per cent of the world's population does not recognize Kosovo and Metohija.

Finally — and I will finish with this — we heard about victims of sexual violence. As a woman, I can say that I think that sexual violence and rape are the worst crimes against humanity. Yes, we know that, unfortunately and regrettably, Albanian women were raped. Serbian women were raped as well. Roma women were raped as well. To be honest, I cannot believe that even victims of sexual violence are seen only through the lens of ethnicity and used only for political propaganda.

The President: Ms. Osmani-Sadriu has asked for the floor. I will give her the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Osmani-Sadriu: I would like to start by thanking all those countries that have been contributing not only through their speeches but also through their work with us on the ground for peace and stability in the entire Western Balkans. To those who have concerns, I would like to say that we want to work with them to make things better, because we in Kosovo believe that democracy is never a finished project.

It was actually sufficient to listen to the speech by the representative of the Russian Federation to understand which party here is telling the truth and which one is propagating falsehoods through a propaganda machine. Russia once again used propaganda against the people of Kosovo and against those who fought for the freedom of Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army. The biggest difference between Kosovo and Serbia is that we are not afraid of justice. That is why we ourselves created the Specialist Chambers, because we will not allow a moral equivalence to be created between those who committed genocide and those who defended our people from genocide. As was the case in the past, we are fully confident that justice will once again prevail.

My people were victims of some of the most horrendous crimes in human history. It is precisely the pain and the suffering we had to go through that make us so committed to never seeing that happen to anyone else ever again, no matter their ethnicity, religion or other background. It is being victims of a genocidal war that has shaped us into the strongest defenders of peace, stability, human rights, the rule of law and freedom, but also defenders of truth against propaganda.

Today the Council heard the representative of Russia and Ms. Brnabić speak about the so-called Kurti terror. Kurti is the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, but he was also a prisoner of war who was almost tortured to death in their prisons, while the President of Serbia, during those same years, was the Minister of Propaganda for Milošević. As if that was not enough, they publicly state — even nowadays, as the President of Serbia did last night — that they wish that they had never released Kurti from prison alive. Yet again, the Prime Minister of Kosovo has chosen dialogue. At that table, led by European Union negotiators, on one side there is the Prime Minister of Kosovo, a war prisoner who was almost tortured to death, and on the other side, there is the Minister of Propaganda of the regime that tortured him.

But we will never give up on dialogue as the only means for resolving any differences between us, because Kosovo is a country full of Mandelas, Gandhis and Martin Luther Kings, and of people who strive for the future, for peace and reconciliation. Our Parliament, our Government, every institution and every house in our Republic is full of survivors of horrendous crimes, but all of them are committed to and working for peace. This is who we are: a nation of survivors who thrive, a nation committed to peace because we have seen the opposite of it, a nation committed to democracy because we have lived the opposite of it, and a nation that is ready to pay any price to ensure the survival and the success of liberty.

The President: I thank Ms. Osmani-Sadriu for her statement. The President thinks that speakers have made their points.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.