



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional*

## 9545<sup>th</sup>

meeting

Thursday, 8 February 2024, 3 p.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Ms. Persaud . . . . .	(Guyana)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Gaouaoui
	China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Iriya
	Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Kumanga
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Cho
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia . . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

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

Letter dated 5 February 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2024/134)

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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)**

#### **Letter dated 5 February 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2024/134)**

**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 His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and I request the Protocol Officer to escort him to a seat at the Council table.

*Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President 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 Mr. Albin Kurti 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/2024/134, which contains the text of a letter dated 5 February 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ziadeh.

**Ms. Ziadeh:** Let me start by thanking you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the latest unfolding developments in Kosovo.

Almost one year ago, two agreements were reached, in Brussels on 27 February and in Ohrid on 18 March, setting forth a pathway towards negotiations and mutual engagement. However, with disagreement

on the sequencing of the implementation, progress was stalled. Subsequent developments — such as the by-elections in four municipalities in northern Kosovo, resulting in mayors elected by barely 3.47 per cent of eligible voters, the ensuing clashes around those municipality buildings on 29 May, which resulted in significant injuries to civilians and personnel of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), and the serious security incident in Banjska on 24 September, which led to fatalities and is still under investigation — were serious setbacks.

Despite some of the positive momentum that re-emerged at the end of last year — with progress achieved over vehicle license plates, the energy road map, customs documentation and the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the initiation of the referendum to recall the mayors — unilateral actions on issues that clearly fall within the political dialogue process and its governing agreements are cause for great concern. Regardless which side takes them and what justifications are provided, and in the absence of unambiguous public communications, such actions predictably exacerbate an environment of insecurity and mistrust.

Recently, on 27 December 2023, the Central Bank Board of Kosovo adopted a regulation and announced that, as of 1 February 2024, the only currency allowed for cash transactions in Kosovo would be the euro. Limited public explanation was offered, despite the fact that, since 1999, the dinar has served as the de facto primary currency for cash and commercial transactions in Kosovo-Serb majority areas. Tens of thousands of individuals are affected, as is the economy, which depends on their purchasing power. More specifically, the regulation interrupts payments to individuals employed by Serbian-funded institutions in Kosovo, certain agricultural and social welfare subsidies and pension recipients. Small and medium-scale businesses, health and education services, including childcare, will also be severely affected, as they also have long become accustomed to receiving funds from Serbia. That decision, particularly as it relates to the short notice of its entry into force and the affected individuals' future access to basic economic and social services, has become a matter of concern for local communities and international interlocutors.

Subsequently in response to the obvious concerns that that has raised, the Kosovo authorities, on 6 February, announced a one-month transitional period for its implementation, together with a communications campaign. Yet not all concerns seem to have been

addressed with regard to the cash flow in dinars, as a cash-transfer truck was denied entry into Kosovo on 7 February, while the issue of 4 million dinars confiscated by the Kosovo police on 3 February in the Pejë/Peć municipality still awaits judicial and administrative action.

As highlighted by many international partners, such issues fall under the Brussels agreements of 2013 and 2015, in which the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities was decided on.

I would like to reiterate that, regardless of their legality or justification, actions must take into consideration their impact on the affected population. Otherwise, such actions not only increase tensions, but also weaken the potential for lasting peace and security across all communities in Kosovo. In the spirit of conflict prevention, more should be done to win the hearts and minds of non-majority communities.

On 26 January and 2 February, Kosovo police conducted operations targeting facilities used by the Serbian non-majority community in the municipalities of Dragash/Dragaš, Pejë/Peć, Klinë/Klina and Istog/Istok, as well as a community health centre in Pristina. The Kosovo police announced that, in all four municipal locations, various documents were seized, buildings were sealed and staff members were taken into custody for questioning and later released. Furthermore, during an earlier police operation in Pejë/Peć on 2 January, a team of journalists from Radio Goraždevac, the only Kosovo-Serbian media outlet in that region, reported being stopped and searched despite having presented valid press credentials.

As Council members are aware, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and our main partners place the highest importance on ensuring the freedoms of the media and expression at all times.

Neither the Central Bank of Kosovo's new regulation nor the recent Kosovo police operations have contributed to de-escalation, as repeatedly called for by international interlocutors. In that regard, I cannot overstate the critical deterrent role that KFOR continues to play on the ground today.

In all my statements, including the most recent on 6 February, I have reaffirmed the importance of upholding the rule of law, free from political influence, and have also reiterated that all related actions must

be anchored in the principles of human rights. I will continue to call on both Pristina and Belgrade to engage actively and in good faith in the European Union-facilitated dialogue as the venue for tackling the most sensitive policy issues that affect the communities. It is crucial that efforts towards negotiated and mutually accepted solutions do not falter. Continuous efforts to build greater mutual trust and respect are the only viable path to stability, prosperity and security.

History has repeatedly shown that just solutions do not emerge from unilateral actions, but rather from sustained and painstaking commitment to open communication and dialogue. We will continue our efforts to encourage all stakeholders to prioritize trust and building trust, not only at the grass-roots levels but at all levels, including between communities and institutions. Trust develops only in an atmosphere that fosters mutual respect, open communication, fairness and both the perception and the reality of equal treatment.

In conclusion, let us recall once again that the only acceptable path ahead is one that is grounded in dialogue and compromise, embraces human rights and ensures the equitable application of the rule of law. I can assure everyone that UNMIK remains committed to providing its good offices towards achieving that ultimate goal.

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

I now call on the President of the Republic of Serbia.

**President Vučić:** I extend my deep appreciation to the Security Council for the quick convening of this meeting. It is of paramount importance, and it is truly necessary because of the ongoing situation in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, which runs absolutely contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions.

In concrete terms, the Provisional Institutions of Self-government in Pristina have created unbearable living conditions for Serbs in the respective territories, and they are now carrying out widespread systematic attacks against Serb civilians, as well as their persecution. In the absence of an appropriate reaction, such a situation could cause irreparable harm to the survival of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija.

At the Security Council meetings dedicated to the six-month report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in

Kosovo (UNMIK), the Republic of Serbia regularly informs the Council and the international public of the ongoing situation, particularly the very difficult position of Serbian and other non-Albanian members of the population in Kosovo and Metohija. The Republic of Serbia requested this emergency meeting of the Security Council precisely because current events and Pristina's activities are of such a nature that they could cause irreparable harm before the next meeting dedicated to the UNMIK six-month report.

The immediate reason for which for which we requested this meeting is the recent step taken by the so-called Kosovo Central Bank, through which payment transactions in Serbian dinars has been banned in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija since 1 February. In having done that, the so-called leadership's continuous series of attacks against Serbs and other non-Albanian populations in Kosovo and Metohija have culminated in a situation whereby their survival in the territory of the southern Serbian province depends to a large extent directly on dinar assets coming first and foremost from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. Given the fact that the Republic of Serbia pays 60,946 salaries and pensions from its budget in dinars and the tuition for 2,430 students and that it funds soup kitchens, which meet the basic needs of the approximately 2,000 most vulnerable citizens, illustrates that the measure is an attack, first of all against the Serbian population, and that it makes the situation in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija difficult.

Those numbers alone clearly demonstrate that the huge number of people in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija directly or indirectly depend on dinar incomes from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. Owing to that, it is obvious that the ban on dinar payment transactions — that is the decision to abolish the dinar as the legal tender — directly deprives a large number of people of their basic personal means of living. Additionally, one should have in mind that approximately 6,794 Serbian and non-Albanian farms in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija depend directly on dinar subsidies from the Republic of Serbia, while the survival of 922 business entities, owned by the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, which are directly dependent on dinar payment transactions, is no longer operationally viable or possible.

To sum up, with the decision to ban dinar payment transactions, Pristina's regime directly disables any operation of all medical, educational, social, cultural

and other institutions that enable Serbs to provide themselves and their families with basic provisions, have education, get medical treatment, buy medications and do everything that is considered to be ordinary life, with a minimum of human dignity.

These institutions are precisely the basis for the establishment of the community of Serb-majority municipalities, whose competencies and structure are clearly defined in the agreement on general principles signed in 2015. Article 17, item (d), of the agreement clearly defines that Serbia has the right to finance the community of Serb-majority municipalities, including, among other things, education and health care, within this agreed institutional framework of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija. Any prevention of the financing of Serbian schools, kindergartens, faculties, hospitals and infirmaries is a direct blow to both the survival of Serbs and the establishment of the community of Serb-majority municipalities. However, it is obvious that precisely creating unbearable living conditions and depriving the Serbs of the possibility of survival is the only objective of the regime in Pristina, which, through these acts of structural violence, intensifies years-long, well-planned and systematic attacks against the Serbian population, and by which the open persecution of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija has begun.

In that sense, I shall demonstrate, with facts, the complete absence of any grounds of the argumentation of the regime in Pristina, claiming that the measure to abolish the dinar and introduce the euro as the only legal tender has been taken solely with the purpose of providing an alleged rule of law. I ask that members bear in mind that the so-called Kosovo Albanian leadership uses the term "rule of law" solely to harm Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is such a widespread and drastic common practice that the Provisional Institutions of Self-government have been publicly and openly denied for eight years the delivery of the final decision of their own Supreme Court on giving back land that is owned by the Visoki Dečani Serbian Orthodox monastery. If members have in mind that this is how Pristina refers to the implementation of the principle of the rule of law, in the case of the UNESCO World Heritage site, which is under 24/7 protection by the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and in a purely Albanian-inhabited environment, and which is inhabited by Serbian Orthodox Church monks, I believe that it is clear the kind of conditions to which the ordinary

Serbian population is subjected by Pristina. They are also the subject of the so-called declarative protection of Pristina's alleged rule of law.

In the context of Pristina's so-called rule of law, to which the Serbs are subjected, allow me to mention another illustrative example. The so-called judiciary, which has been massively persecuting Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and potential Serbian returnees through false accusations of war crimes and other crimes, simply made a decision that a member of illegal so-called Kosovo security forces, Azem Kurtaj, who on Christmas Eve 2023 had shot, with his service gun, a Serb child, Stefan Stojanovic, 11 years old, and his cousin, Milos, 21 years old, should be released pending his trial. He should defend himself not against the accusation of the obvious attempted murder of a child but against an offense that is equivalent to provoking public danger, like when someone, let us say, throws firecrackers on New Year's Eve.

In that regard, one must keep in mind that this is only one of 470 unpunished ethnically motivated attacks against Serbs, the Serbian Orthodox Church and their property since 2021, since the so-called Kosovo Albanian leadership has been led by Albin Kurti, who is now at the forefront of the persecution of Serbs. Among those incidents that began in 2021 are also dramatic cases of endless police beatings and harassment of Serbs and even the brutal and unprovoked shooting of Dragiša Gajak and four more Serbs, which the Pristina regime did not find worthy of formal investigation. Just as a comparison, for the entire nine years prior to Kurti's rise to power in 2021, there had been a total of 669 such ethnically motivated attacks registered, which is an increase of 300 per cent.

Pristina's regime, which, in the aforementioned way, creates unbearable living conditions, places Serbs outside of the law and persecutes them, claims now that the decision on abolishing the dinar as legal tender was made in order to implement the rule of law, although this factual contradiction reveals that this is not about the formal rule of law but solely about the mechanism for finalizing the creation of unbearable living conditions for Serbs and for their persecution.

I will point out another indisputable fact. It seems indisputable that the euro was introduced in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija as the only legal tender in an obviously illegal way, because it was done by the unilateral decision of the political leadership

in Pristina. It is indisputable, not only owing to the fact that the dinar is legal tender in the Republic of Serbia and, therefore, cannot be banned in Kosovo and Metohija, which is part of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, placed under international administration by resolution 1244 (1999).

This dangerous measure of the regime in Pristina was also taken illegally because the euro is a legal international currency, issued by the European Central Bank. Owing to that, it is obvious that Pristina's leadership resorted to an illegal use of the euro, according to publicly available information from the European Union and the European Central Bank. The latter says in its official web presentation that the so-called Kosovo:

“adopted the euro unilaterally in 2002 and has since used it as its *de facto* currency. This means that the euro is not legal tender there but is treated as such by the population.”

Therefore, imposing the euro in this case was undeniably done not for purposes related to the rule of law but without any legal basis or appropriate arrangements with the European Union and only and exclusively for the purpose of completing the creation of unbearable living conditions for Serbs and their expulsion from Kosovo and Metohija.

We emphasize once again that the decision to abolish the circulation of the dinar, that is the abolition of the dinar as a legal means of payment in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, is only one in a series of planned, well-organized long-implemented and systematic measures by Pristina that attack the Serbian population above all, and the ultimate goal of which is to finally create unbearable living conditions and expel Serbs from the territory.

The difficult situation in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, especially the position of the Serb population, drastically deteriorated after the April 2023 elections in four municipalities in the north of Kosovo and Metohija. After the political representatives of the majority Serb population in those municipalities, owing to increased repression and political disenfranchisement, left the Provisional Institutions of Self-government at the request of their voters, additional pressures and attacks by Pristina on the Serbian people followed.

With the constant structural and physical violence of armed formations, composed almost exclusively of Albanians, Pristina, contrary to the will of the Serbs,



called and held elections in those four municipalities. For clear and justified reasons, the Serbs boycotted these elections. More than 97 per cent of the inhabitants of the north of Kosovo and Metohija are Serbs, so only 0.029 per cent of the total number of Serbs and only slightly more than 3 per cent of the total number of registered voters turned out for these so-called elections.

The elections were held in completely undemocratic conditions, and illegitimate Albanian mayors forcibly occupied the local self-government with the help of heavily armed personnel of the alleged special police that are members of very well-equipped Albanian armed formations. This was followed by the removal of Serbian symbols and display of the signifiers of so-called Kosovo. Serbs, who until then worked in local self-government, were forbidden access to their workplaces, and the municipal facilities themselves were fenced off and surrounded by barbed wire.

That situation led to peaceful protests by Serbs, to which Albanian armed groups responded by injuring more than 50 Serbs on 29 May 2023 alone. In that course of events, there was also the tragic and reprehensible wounding of KFOR personnel members, that for reasons that are incomprehensible to us, intentionally or unintentionally practically enabled the realization of Albin Kurti's goals. In those events, four Serbs were wounded by firearms, and one participant of the protests, Dragiša Gajak, was shot in the back with automatic weapons. As we have already mentioned, no members of Pristina's armed formations were processed for this violence against the Serbs.

After the respective developments, the United States Secretary of State, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, as well as almost all international officials, clearly and directly accused Pristina of escalation on the ground. No doubt, that was done by Russian, Chinese and all other officials that have never recognized Kosovo's independence.

In spite of that, at the European Political Community meeting in Chisinau, I was asked to call on Serbs to sign the petition for the replacement of Albanian mayors in Serb-majority municipalities in the north by President Macron and Chancellor Scholz. I told them not to push Serbs who were under brutal repression to sign the petition and not to humiliate them. I told them that their respective position made no sense, because

it is obvious that no one anywhere in Europe could be legally or legitimately in power if they were elected with 3 per cent of the votes of the total numbers of voters. In any case, that is how Albanians were elected in environments where Serbs make up 97 per cent of the population.

Unfortunately, no one wanted to listen to that, or help to end Kurti's crimes. Instead of asking for unconditional de-escalation from Pristina, Serbs were asked to unconditionally take part in new elections that Kurti had no intention of organizing or enabling. Additionally, Serbia was asked to lower the level of combat alert of the armed forces and to reduce the number of soldiers close to administrative lines to the usual level, without having previously been informed that, at that moment, there were even fewer Serbian soldiers than was usually the case.

We met that request almost immediately, while Pristina was allegedly sanctioned through the introduction of measures under which it is being equipped with modern weapons by those who imposed measures against it in the first place. When we asked which international legal document envisaged the existence of any other armed formation in Kosovo and Metohija apart from KFOR, and according to which document those illegal Albanian formations are being supplied with weapons, the answer we got was that those who do the latter are powerful; that they recognize the so-called independence of Kosovo; that they do not care about resolution 1244 (1999) or the Charter of the United Nations; and that they can do whatever they please.

Those who are supplying weapons to illegal armed formations of Kosovo Albanians do not stop talking about the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We do not mind that, but we do mind the fact that not only is the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija not being respected, but it is also being undermined and violated. Such respect is explicitly guaranteed by resolution 1244 (1999) and the Charter of the United Nations.

Due to all that, it is logical that many months of Belgrade's efforts to find a solution to the problem in cooperation with the international community were not fruitful. Although it is a fact that the international community marked Pristina as the sole culprit for the escalation, Pristina basically did not face serious consequences for its actions. But the terror against the

Serbian population has intensified, including, among other things, physical attacks on Serbs, the shutdown of their institutions and attacks on their property and the private property of the Serbian Orthodox Church. That is quantitatively confirmed by data showing that, in 2023, 179 ethnically motivated attacks on Serbs were recorded, while as many as 21 such attacks have already been recorded since the beginning of this year.

It is a case of institutionalized physical and structural violence, accompanied by incursions by Albanian armed groups into institutions financed by the Republic of Serbia and shutting them down; attacks on shipments of money intended for the payment of salaries, pensions, scholarships and social benefits; and the arrest and harassment of health-care and postal workers who, in the same lawful manner as for the past quarter of a century, transparently try to deliver money to those to whom it belongs; as well as by many other acts of violence.

I particularly emphasize that Pristina is using armed formations more and more openly and recklessly in carrying out the persecution of Serbs. Those formations are composed exclusively of Kosovo Albanians, and their existence on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija is undeniably illegal and contrary to resolution 1244 (1999). Since November 2022, various such armed formations have used illegal and disproportionate force against the Serbian population 98 times, 83 of which in the north of Kosovo and Metohija.

Using the mechanisms of the Provisional Institutions of Self-government, in the period since November 2022 they have carried out 38 incursions into the north of Kosovo and Metohija. With the illegal expropriation of land privately owned by Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church, they have established a continuous presence in that area, where Serbs make up more than 97 per cent of the population.

Those armed groups also carry out arbitrary arrests of prominent Serbian individuals in that region and other known forms of physical and institutional violence against the Serbian population. Among other things, they carry out acts of mass intimidation of the Serbian population using the following methods.

First, obstructing the freedom of movement of Serbs through reasonless stops and subjecting them to humiliating treatment, beatings and even other violent acts at illegally established armed checkpoints and other locations throughout the north.

Second, unjustifiably opening fire and an almost constant presence of armoured fighting vehicles in peaceful urban areas.

Third, the illegal expropriation of land privately owned by Serbs, which is then used to build new military facilities in that area.

Fourth, adopting decisions on the confiscation of buildings that are and have been owned by Serbian institutions for more than a century.

Fifth, the violent seizure of the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church, thereby violating the special protective zones around Serbian Orthodox Church facilities.

Sixth, the ploughing and destruction of Serbian cemeteries.

Seventh, the imposition of an illegal embargo on Serbian goods and the confiscation of legal goods owned by Serbian traders.

Unfortunately, the list of illegal activities does not end there, and it is much longer when actions against Serbs in all other areas of Kosovo and Metohija that they still inhabit are included.

As a reminder, according to resolution 1244 (1999) in its paragraph 9 (b), paragraph 15 and annex 1, armed groups of Albanians had to be demilitarized, implying a ban on their reformation in one form or another. Providing them with modern military equipment is undoubtedly contrary to that resolution. The violence and persecution that Pristina is now openly carrying out against Serbs is a natural part of the long-term, systematic and widespread attack on the Serbian civilian population throughout Kosovo and Metohija.

In the past year alone, due obviously to the described physical and structural violence of Pristina institutions towards the Serbian population, more than 14 per cent of Serbs have left Kosovo and Metohija. It is tragic that Pristina is carrying out the actions mentioned while, at the same time, with the mediation of the EU, the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has been in progress for many years.

In 2010, the General Assembly designated in a resolution that dialogue as an instrument for strengthening security and cooperation, achieving progress on the path to the EU and improving the lives of the people (General Assembly resolution 64/298). Its basic formal scope was certainly the First Agreement of

Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, dated 19 April 2013, which obliged Pristina to establish the community of Serb municipalities. Its formation in accordance with the 2013 and 2015 agreements, which Pristina persistently refuses to implement, would create an atmosphere in which Serbs would have at least a chance for a dignified life and protection from persecution and violence.

That is why, in the light of the conditions of the ongoing persecution of Serbs, it has become quite clear why Pristina refuses to fulfil its obligation to form the community of Serb municipalities. Instead of creating conditions for the survival of Serbs in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, we are witnessing well planned, systematic and widespread measures that deliberately create unbearable living conditions and persecute Serbs, thereby rendering the physical survival of the Serb population on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija impossible. What we are speaking about here is not a matter of wonky dialogue, but of faux legalism from Pristina's side.

The current situation in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija is of such a nature that it undoubtedly leads to the deterioration of the situation, international friction and the emergence of disputes that pose a threat to international peace and security, as the political leadership of the Kosovo Albanians carries out systematic and widespread attacks against the Serbian population.

In order to respond in advance to today's already inappropriate calls for restraint and responsibility by both parties, which has unfortunately become a kind of mantra in the statements of international actors on the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, it seems necessary to point out the policy of the Republic of Serbia, which is based on the Charter of the United Nations and, when it comes to the situation on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, on strict respect for the resolutions of the Security Council.

Serbia opposes all factors of instability and strives to be a solid pillar of stability in the Western Balkans region. For years, Serbia has been attracting record amounts of foreign direct investment — greater than the rest of the region's countries combined. Serbia's development plans are very ambitious. We will host Expo 2027, which will have a particular impact on our development strategy and has been worked out in thorough detail, planned under the colourful theme "Leap into the Future".

Serbia, as a responsible country and a constructive international actor, has addressed the Security Council and has thus far refrained from any unilateral response to the actions of Pristina. I do not believe that it is in anyone's interest, in a world where too many hotspots have already been opened, for the Balkans to once again become a zone of instability due to the blind and senseless hatred of the Pristina regime towards Serbs living in Kosovo and Metohija.

I hope that, after today's meeting, even those members of the Security Council who recognized the illegal, unilaterally declared independence of the southern Serbian province will understand that Pristina's latest moves are not just an attempt to consolidate something that a significant majority of Member States, including Serbia, do not recognize as a State, but to endanger and violate the peace. Pristina's attempt to implement the abolition of dinar payment transactions and remove the dinar as a means of payment is nothing more than the latest in a series of acts of persecution, a systematic and widespread attack on the Serbian population — in short, a crime against humanity.

I also take this opportunity to thank all of the officials from the United States and the European Union and all our traditional friends from the East for reacting to Pristina's latest escalating moves with statements of condemnation. However, the recent seizure in Pristina of money intended for pensions and social benefits for Serbs and the arrest and criminal prosecution of people who transferred that money in a completely transparent and legal manner, as in all years during the past quarter of a century, irrefutably proves that the statements delivered were clearly not enough to persuade Pristina to immediately end the prosecution of the Serbs and turn away from attempts to destabilize the region. I am not even sure that the request of certain international actors to postpone the implementation of the regulation is the right way, because in that way Pristina is actually indirectly encouraged to continue making unilateral decisions with the technical procedural requirement that it just be more careful in choosing the moment and the manner of implementing those unilateral moves.

The solution to this crisis and to all other crises that Pristina has produced in the past period can only be a clear order to immediately stop all the aforementioned measures, which deliberately create unbearable living conditions and carry out the persecution of Serbs, and the decisive discouragement and prevention



of Pristina resorting to any unilateral moves in the future concerning the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija. In that context, we ask the Security Council not to lose sight of the fact that, in 2022, the Republic of Serbia, owing to the described threat to the safety and survival of Serbs by armed Albanian formations, sent a request to the Kosovo Force (KFOR) Commander that, in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999) and the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement, enabled the return of the agreed number of Serbian security personnel who would assist international forces in protecting the Serbian population. Although the aforementioned international legal documents clearly provide for the obligation of the KFOR Commander to enable such returns, that did not happen.

The Republic of Serbia therefore calls on the Security Council, international organizations and countries that can influence the resolution of the crisis to take urgent and decisive measures with the aim of normalizing the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, preventing further persecution of Serbs and creating conditions for the resumption of a meaningful dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999). The Republic of Serbia, for its part, will implement all agreements and undertake all necessary measures in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In conclusion, I want to thank all representatives of the Security Council members, particularly those countries that strictly observe the United Nations Charter and the principles on which international law is founded, and all of those who showed readiness to listen to me and hear what Serbia has to say regarding the issue of Kosovo and Metohija and the need to protect the Serbian people from the persecution carried out by Provisional Institutions of Self-government in Pristina, which may lead to irreparable harm and which all of us together must avoid in the interest of the preservation of life, peace and stability.

**The President:** I thank President Vučić for his statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kurti.

**Mr. Kurti:** There is a deep and uncomfortable irony and, frankly, a dystopian feeling in responding to false allegations of human rights abuses made by a country known to have committed the most recent

genocide of the twentieth century and a Government that is currently one of the biggest authoritarian threats to regional peace and security. This very Security Council established the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1993 because of horrific crimes and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. Throughout the 1990s, the Serbian Government ordered, planned and committed murder, torture, mutilation and rape, committing genocide in Srebrenica and Kosova. Feminist legal scholars have extensively shown how rape was used as a tool of war. The brutality of what was committed changed international human rights law forever.

Out of that misery, Kosova emerged from the war as a symbol of the fight for dignity and the triumph of human rights, and we did not grow bitter. We have built ourselves into a forward-facing, multicultural and multi-ethnic republic and a growing and robust democratic State. Sixteen years after independence and a quarter century after war and devastation, today we stand tall and proud — a republic for all, a multi-ethnic society of all. Our Government's dedication to democracy, the rule of law and human rights has bolstered both our economy and internal unity. Since NATO's intervention, we have actively engaged with numerous international allies to establish democratic and efficient institutions. In the past three years, our economy has surged, with average growth of 6.2 per cent, doubled foreign direct investments and exports and a two-thirds rise in tax revenues, without substantial fiscal policy change. We have funnelled that growth into the region's largest fiscal package, recognized by the World Bank to directly aid citizens, families and businesses in facing global energy and cost-of-living challenges. Kosova is a success story of NATO intervention in the spring of 1999 and an inspiring lesson on how economic development and democratic progress can go hand in hand.

That progress has been recognized by a number of international organizations. The 2023 Freedom House report ranks Kosova first in the Western Balkans, second in Europe and third globally for advancements in political rights and civil liberties. We improved by 22 places in just two years in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. Similarly, we jumped 21 places in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index since our Government took office.

Our growth and well-being are shared with minorities. We proudly have and enforce one of the Constitutions with the highest protections of minority rights, which include 20 guaranteed seats in the Parliament out of 120, of which 10 are for Serbs. For perspective, the entire population of Kosovo is approximately 1.8 million, and the Serbian community is about 4 per cent of it. Serbs in Kosovo also run 10 out of 38 municipalities, so more than 25 per cent of them. We have made sure to allocate a substantial part of our budget to them and ensured that the Serbian language is an official language everywhere. We are actively working with the help of other Governments and international non-governmental organizations to bolster those rights. Just last year, the Ministry for Communities and Returns, led by an ethnic Serb Minister, allocated millions in 265 grants to non-governmental organizations, farmers and small businesses from non-majority communities. The majority of those funds went to Kosovo Serbs.

This month, we are launching a new initiative to support employment for up to 2,000 residents of the four northern municipalities. The effort will be facilitated by our newly established Employment Agency Office at the municipality of Leposavić, a Serbian majority municipality. The Ministry of Finance's Kosovo Generation Unlimited Programme provides paid internships for youth, which are also awarded to Kosovo Serb youth. Our energy efficiency programme subsidizes energy-efficient home heating equipment, with 17 per cent of subsidies benefiting non-majority communities, including Kosovo Serbs. We have allocated funds for building and repairing homes in Serb communities and provided an additional €5.6 million to serve majority municipalities this year. Education grants for those municipalities are more than 20 per cent higher per student compared to others. In the period from 2008 to 2022, the 10 Serb-majority municipalities enjoyed, on average, a budget that was 62 per cent larger per capita than the rest of Kosovo. And for 2024, the Ministry for Communities and Returns has the largest budget increase of all our ministries apart from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, which has the investment for the Mediterranean Games 2030. The press releases of the Office of the Prime Minister are always issued in both the Albanian and Serbian languages. In addition, Government meetings are also live-streamed in both Albanian and Serbian.

The idea that Kosovo is conducting an ethnic cleansing campaign of persecution against the Serb community is a lie that has been debunked by numerous public bodies. In October, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the Serbian authorities and media to refrain from hate speech against Kosovars and from disseminating propaganda about ethnic cleansing and pogroms in Kosovo. Last year, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights detailed how the Serbian Government intentionally spreads fear regarding the false endangerment of Serbs in Kosovo in order to radicalize society and create a toxic atmosphere in which an agreement with Kosovo would be rejected. The false claims have also been disproved by the European Stability Initiative, a think tank based in Berlin and Vienna that obtained documents directly from official Serbian institutions. Their official statistics on State health insurance, school enrolments, pension recipients and birth rates in hospitals prove that the percentage of Serbs leaving Kosovo corresponds to that of those leaving Serbia. That means that the Serbs who leave Kosovo, just like those who leave Serbia, are doing so in order to pursue opportunities in Western Europe, not to flee some fictional ethnic cleansing campaign.

Instead, let us focus on Serbia's treatment of its ethnic Albanian population today — an ethnic cleansing campaign carried out administratively. The Serbian Government has systematically removed more than 4,200 ethnic Albanians from the civil registry in Medveda and more than 2,000 in Bujanovac. That erasure has tangible consequences. The victims lose access to identity documents, passports, medical services, social assistance, vehicle registration, property transactions, pensions and voting rights, leaving them stateless. That discriminatory targeting constitutes a method for depopulating the Albanian community in Serbia.

Ethnic Albanian citizens are far from the only target of Serbia's authoritarianism. On 2 January, the editorial board of *The Guardian* newspaper described the state of politics there as State capture. A few hours ago, the European Parliament adopted by an overwhelming majority a resolution calling for an investigation into the elections held in December, citing manipulated results, aggressive rhetoric, verbal abuse and efforts by the Russian media to actively engage in disinformation on behalf of the Government. Serbia has aligned itself with Russia. Except for Belarus, it is the only European country that has not imposed sanctions on Russia

following Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and it acts as the Kremlin's Trojan horse in South-Eastern Europe and in a geopolitical war against a democratic world. When at the age of 24 I became a political prisoner in Serbia for two years and seven months, I heard the guards one day loudly expressing joy and euphoria. It was 11 September 2001. Sadly, that violent, anti-democratic sentiment still prevails, and mafia-style authoritarianism and the glorification of torture reign supreme.

I will now turn to the recent regulation on cash operations of the Central Bank of Kosova, which entered into force on 1 February. Let me be absolutely clear. The regulation does nothing to prohibit or prevent the Government of Serbia from providing financial support to Kosova Serbs. Any suggestion to the contrary is nothing more than false propaganda aimed at inciting ethnic tensions. The regulation seeks merely to ensure the transparency and legality of cash imported into Kosova, in line with both our Constitution and European Union (EU) monetary policy. The very same rules apply to all cash imports from any country in any currency. They do not ban transfers of dinars from Serbia any more than they ban transfers of dollars from the United States, pounds from the United Kingdom — or, for that matter, leks from Albania.

The Central Bank of Kosova is committed to doing all that it can to ensure that Kosova Serbs are able to continue receiving uninterrupted and unimpeded financial support from Serbia. It has sent a letter to its counterpart, the National Bank of Serbia, proposing an agreement on the transfer of funds through legal and transparent means, in full compliance with the new regulation. And our Government is fully committed to ensuring a smooth transition with sufficient time invested in education and information rather than imposing penalties for non-compliance. We are committed to jointly identifying and promoting the best available tools to ensure a continuation of financial transfers from Serbia to legal municipalities and households.

The Central Bank's regulation is not seeking to harm any one group of citizens but rather to protect all citizens of every ethnic community from the threats of organized crime, arms trafficking and money-laundering. All of those activities rely on the ability of criminal groups to receive illegally smuggled cash, largely across our border with Serbia. Citizens in the north of Kosova — an overwhelming majority of whom are ethnic Serbs — are threatened day in and day out by

such groups. Our Serb citizens face intimidation from criminal groups dictating their actions, from protesting to voting. Disobedience results in violence, car burnings and threats to family members. When Kosova Serbs ask to meet with me, we cannot make the meetings public because their lives and livelihoods are threatened. That must stop. Belgrade cannot be endlessly permitted to finance its criminals and terrorists in Kosova with undeclared and unregulated streams of money flowing freely and illegally into our country.

And that is the real source of Belgrade's hysteria over the Central Bank's regulation. It has sounded the alarm not because dinars are being exchanged for euros, but because we are banning large sacks of money at the border. They are crying foul not out of concern for the plight of Kosova Serb citizens, but because their convenient pipeline of illegal cash into northern Kosova is about to be shut off. That gathering, and the propaganda and vitriol that have preceded it, are nothing more than part of a ruthless campaign by an authoritarian regime. The Republic of Kosova is fortunate to enjoy broad support from its international partners and allies in its fight against organized crime and corruption. The Central Bank and its regulations are just as essential to that fight as police officers, prosecutors and judges. In some ways, we are not surprised that Serbia is trying to create problems out of democratic procedures. Since the end of the war, the Serbian Government, run by many of the people who held senior positions in the Milošević Government — including Mr. Vučić, Milošević's information propaganda minister — has mustered all its power and imagination to find new ways to terrorize Kosova.

Unsurprisingly, Serbia not only promotes genocide denialism but also violently enforces it. After the Serbian opposition leader Nikola Sandulović apologized for Serbia's war crimes in Kosova and laid flowers on the grave of a seven-year-old victim, the Serbian secret service arrested him early this January and beat him until he was unconscious, leaving him paralysed. Meanwhile, the Kosova Serbian journalist Radomir Dimić, who has resided in Serbia, has publicly stated that he plans to return to Kosova because Mr. Vučić's authoritarian regime has made life intolerable for journalists, and as we speak now, he has arrived in Kosova.

Sadly, even 25 years after the end of the war, Serbia persists in its violent attempts to reclaim Kosova. A glaring instance of that occurred on 24 September of

last year. About 80 paramilitary troops, organized and supported by Serbia, launched an unprovoked attack on a Kosova police patrol, resulting in the death of one police sergeant, Afrim Bunjaku, and injuries to two others. Despite the terrorists' attempt to use innocent Serbian pilgrims as human shields in a monastery, aiming to exploit any casualties for anti-Kosova propaganda, our police force's professionalism prevented any civilian casualties.

Then on 27 September, Serbia declared an official three-day mourning period for the terrorists killed in the Kosova police anti-terror operation. Council members will have noticed today that Mr. Vučić recalled that several Serbs were wounded or injured in various incidents but did not mention those three Serbs who were killed. Why did he not mention them? It is because he knows that they were terrorists who were financed, supported and orchestrated by him. That is why they were not mentioned at all. On 29 September, the United States National Security Council drew the world's attention to an unprecedented deployment of Serbian tanks, troops and heavy artillery along the Kosova-Serbia border. It was only after international pressure from the United States and others that Serbia finally pulled back its forces. Meanwhile, Kosova police discovered a disturbing set of documents left behind by the terrorists in their hasty retreat to Serbia. The documents show that the 24 September attack was part of a larger plan to violently annex the north of Kosova via a coordinated assault on 37 separate positions. A corridor was then to be established to enable a continuing supply of arms and troops from Serbia.

In the months since then, Serbia has rejected international calls to extradite the terrorists to Kosova or otherwise hold them accountable. The paramilitary leader of the 24 September attack, Milan Radoičić, former Vice-President of the Belgrade-sponsored political party in Kosova, Srpska Lista, who has been sanctioned by the United States and the United Kingdom, is still roaming free in Serbia, just as Serbia itself has so far escaped international sanctions for its role in the attack. INTERPOL issued an arrest warrant for Radoičić in December that is still outstanding and that Serbia has ignored. That impunity is unacceptable and dangerous. As President Biden said in October of last year, history has taught us that when terrorists do not pay a price for their terror, and when dictators do not pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction. They keep going.

Those are wise words. Serbia must be held to account for its terror and aggression, or it will keep going.

Serbia's increasingly alarming acts of aggression and terrorism make it all the more urgent that it should fulfil its obligations under the basic agreement reached between our countries on 27 February of last year. The agreement was facilitated by the European Union and reflects Europe's renewed engagement in resolving the main dispute between Kosova and Serbia. It has also been endorsed as legally binding by the United States. The European Union's obligations in the dialogue emanate from General Assembly resolution 64/298. Accordingly, on 12 May of last year, the EU notified the Secretary-General that an agreement had been reached between Kosova and Serbia. The next logical step would be for the EU to formally register that agreement with the United Nations.

The basic agreement sets a benchmark of de facto recognition, based on the 1972 Basic Treaty between East and West Germany. The agreement's text expressly invokes the Charter of the United Nations as the guiding light governing the relations between our countries. It imposes a number of obligations on the parties, including developing good-neighbourly relations, as specified in Article I; engaging with one another on a basis of sovereign equality and respecting one another's territorial integrity, as specified in Article II; refraining from the threat or use of force, as specified in Article III; and for Serbia, abiding by the obligation not to object to Kosova's membership in any international organizations, as specified in Article IV. The chief innovation of the agreement is the elevation of the de facto relations between our countries to the level of sovereign equals, beyond the mere recognition of documents, symbols and institutions, in addition to a minor upgrade of liaison offices.

Unfortunately, nearly a year after the agreement was reached, Serbia seems to be suffering from a severe case of buyer's remorse. Its Prime Minister, Ms. Ana Brnabić, sent a letter to the EU on 13 December stating that the agreement is not legally binding. Serbia also rejects two of its key obligations — refraining from objecting to Kosova's international membership and respecting its territorial integrity. Those refusals, particularly of the second obligation, suggest a willingness to retain the option of invading Kosova. Against that backdrop, signing the agreement is not a mere formality. It is the only guarantee of its full and unconditional implementation for Kosova's national



security and regional peace. Despite my repeated offers, Mr. Vučić has refused to sign it. I invite him, here at this meeting, to sign it right now, emphasizing the Charter's crucial role in our agreement and relations. That symbolic act would demonstrate his commitment to peaceful and neighbourly relations with Kosova.

Kosova is primarily known worldwide for the massacres and ethnic cleansing that occurred under the Milošević regime. But few realize that that was only the most recent chapter in a century of State crimes against Kosovar Albanians. Starting with Ilija Garašanin in nineteenth century, leading Serbian figures devised 24 plans for deporting or exterminating Kosova Albanians. Our people's history represents one of the greatest anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century, although it is still unrecognized internationally. While the genocide in the 1990s marked a climax, our oppression began long before and resonates with citizens across many nations.

In acknowledging the painful history of oppression and violence endured by our people, we are committed to safeguarding the rights of all individuals. Our past experience has instilled in us a profound desire to create a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. As a nation that has overcome immense adversity, we aspire to serve as a beacon of solidarity and respect for human rights.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Kurti for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadeh for her briefing on the situation in Kosovo and the information she provided and welcome the participation of President Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia in today's meeting. We listened to the views of Mr. Kurti. We are grateful to the presidency of Guyana for promptly convening today's Security Council meeting on Kosovo at the request of Serbia and Russia.

Unfortunately, in addition to the conflict in Gaza, where Israel is trying with all its might to force out the Palestinians, we are currently witnessing the risk of having another such hotspot emerge very soon, this time in the Balkans, where the Kosovo authorities, who are creating outrageous facts on the ground, are doing the same to ethnic Serbs, whom Mr. Kurti just

called "criminals" and "terrorists" in this Chamber. The severity of the problem has already reached such proportions that there is now a direct threat to the physical survival of the Serb population of the autonomous province of Kosovo. In their attempt to establish total control over the north of Kosovo and get rid of the non-Albanian population, the Pristina authorities have organized a genuine anti-Serbian reign of terror, with the obvious goal of creating intolerable living conditions for Kosovo Serbs in order to force them to leave their ancestral homes forever. To put it bluntly, under the very noses of our American and European colleagues and who indulge Pristina, a policy is under way today in Kosovo and Metohija that has chilling associations with real instances of ethnic cleansing and that the West's self-proclaimed defenders of universal human rights are doing their best to ignore.

The Kosovo regime has used numerous methods concurrently to drive out the citizens it does not want. In particular, Pristina's proxies at the head of four municipalities continue their malicious activities, and the embargo on importing Serbian goods remains effective. As we just learned from the Serbian President, that resulted in more than 14 per cent of Serbs leaving the province last year. The immediate reason for convening today's meeting was Pristina's illegal decision to ban the circulation of the Serbian dinar in Kosovo. That criminal and treacherous step makes the lives of ordinary citizens almost unbearable, as about 100,000 non-Albanians may be left without pensions, scholarships and salaries, not to mention that it jeopardizes the functioning of humanitarian institutions, including children's day-care facilities, hospitals, schools, companies and industrial enterprises. It is not an economic measure, but a political and discriminatory one, torpedoing all the efforts of the international community to find compromises and sustainable solutions in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. As a result, there is a direct risk of a new outbreak of violence in the Balkans.

We are convinced that, in these circumstances, the Security Council must check the arrogant Kosovo leaders who seek, without any justification, to turn the dialogue with Belgrade into an instrument for settling the issue of status, contrary to the provisions of resolution 1244 (1999), which confirms the sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia over the territory of Kosovo and Metohija.



The atmosphere of hatred, which has reached a critical level, in Kosovo is embodied in hostile rhetoric, acts of intimidation by Pristina's security forces, regular attacks on Serbs and their property and systematic acts of vandalism against Orthodox shrines. The electoral rights of non-Albanian citizens are being grossly violated, their property illegally alienated and the activities of Serbian companies, administrative and utility services forcibly curtailed. Psychological pressure is being systematically increased. For example, in 2023 alone, there were 178 ethnicity-based attacks on Serbs and their property.

There is a campaign to usurp and Albanize Serbian cultural heritage. The history of Kosovo and Metohija is being rewritten, churches are being taken over and ancient Orthodox churches are being declared Catholic. Traces of the centuries-old Serb presence on that land are being erased. For example, at the end of December 2023, Pristina again declared two medieval Orthodox churches in the north of the province Catholic without any consultation with the Serbian Orthodox Church and began their alleged reconstruction. Another egregious case occurred in January: Kosovo Albanians organized a raid on the thirteenth-century Orthodox Monastery of the Mother of God in Hvosno in the west of Kosovo. No less shocking is the consistent policy of the Provisional Institutions of Self-government in Pristina to sabotage the implementation of its key and, in fact, the only commitment made almost 11 years ago during the dialogue with Serbia, which was mediated by the European Union. I am referring to Pristina's commitment to forming a Serb-majority community of municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija. That mechanism, enshrined in the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, was designed as a bridge for cooperation and confidence-building among ordinary people — Serbs and Albanians — and as a necessary institutional barrier to prevent discrimination and persecution attempts against Serbs.

It is also hard to ignore the dominance in the province of Kosovo of Albanian militias, whose very existence contravenes resolution 1244 (1999). According to the resolution, they should have been demilitarized, which implies a ban on their reconstitution in any form. In fact, Kosovo has plunged into true lawlessness: Serbs were deprived of their legal right to vote in the Serbian referendum and elections in 2023 and there are serious repressions and crimes against humanity.

Arbitrary detentions of prominent Serb activists, mass intimidation and physical and institutional violence against the Serb population take place throughout the province. The President of Serbia provided a detailed account of that today, but allow me to add that the scale of the lawlessness is staggering. It is hard to believe that this is happening today, in this day and age, in the heart of Europe. What is even more striking is that Washington and Brussels are watching this coolly, pretending that it is not a big deal.

Instead of demanding a settlement within the existing international legal framework, the European Union, which actually endorsed the framework, is blackmailing Belgrade and talking about introducing oral agreements that were reached with Pristina in February and March 2023 to the Serbian negotiations file and seeking to make them legally binding. At the same time, they completely ignore the Brussels Agreement, which makes Brussels' words no more than empty sounds. It is a vivid illustration of the European Union's intractability and its complete failure as a mediator between Belgrade and Pristina. At the same time, Serbia continues to be subjected to fraudulent and unfair demands to recognize Kosovo and its accession to multilateral mechanisms, including the United Nations. Furthermore, the West is pushing for the province's admission to the Council of Europe. It is unprecedented for a membership candidate not to be a State. In short, the collective West is making full use of the so-called rules-based order, undermining the norms of international law.

In order to see how to establish lasting peace on Serbian soil, we must recall the real cause of the current dramatic developments. I mean the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In March we will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the inhumane annihilation of civilians in the heart of Europe by the Americans and their allies. The so-called champions of democracy bombed the country with depleted uranium shells, which resulted in mass civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Catastrophic damage was done to the environment. NATO will be cursed for that by the next 60 generations of people doomed to suffer health issues because of Washington's criminal actions, which former United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright cynically called collateral damage.

Today Washington and its satellites continue to actively support the aggressive policy of Kosovo Albanians against Serbs. As one of the founders of

the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council, the United States has gone so far as to publicly and officially announce its intention to violate Council resolutions. For example, the Pentagon has publicly announced plans to supply Pristina with 24 Javelin anti-tank missile systems and 246 shells. That provocative step would be a flagrant violation of resolution 1244 (1999). Inspired by Washington, Kosovo Albanians are now openly saying that Kosovo in its current form is just a “temporary project on the way to unification with Albania”. At the same time, they have announced rearmament of Kosovo’s so-called police and the launch of compulsory military service by 2028. Everyone is aware that such steps transforming the so-called Kosovo security forces into an army would also constitute a violation of resolution 1244 (1999).

In addition to what I have said, we have quite a number of our own questions as to Pristina’s actions. However, we believe it would be more appropriate to discuss those during the April meeting of the Security Council on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). In these extremely difficult circumstances, efforts by UNMIK are very much needed, which means that its human resources and funding should be maintained and perhaps even increased.

We call on Security Council members to take urgent measures to protect Kosovo Serbs and demand that Pristina cease its crackdown on them, including the lifting of all discriminatory measures. We are convinced that the only way to establish peace on Serbian soil is to elaborate a sustainable, mutually acceptable international legal solution between Belgrade and Pristina on the basis of resolution 1244 (1999). Such a solution must be in the interests of Belgrade and the Serbian people and must be approved by the Security Council.

**Mr. Camilleri** (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh for her briefing. I also welcome the President of Serbia and the Prime Minister of Kosovo to today’s meeting.

Malta has been following closely the latest developments in Kosovo. We are concerned about the sudden decision by the Central Bank to ban cash transactions in dinars in its territory. The closure of several offices of Serbian-run institutions and the Centre for Peace and Tolerance in Pristina also raises serious concerns about the living conditions of Kosovo

Serbs. We reiterate that unilateral actions implemented without due notification and consultation, especially actions that directly affect ethnic minorities, serve only to destabilize the situation in the region and increase the risk of violence. We welcome the fact that, since the announcement was made by the Central Bank, the Government of Kosovo has taken heed of the concerns raised. It has committed to a transition period and a communications campaign regarding the impact of the regulation. We stress that that period must be sufficiently long to allow those affected to access alternate methods of payment.

Malta urges both sides to focus on all efforts to ease tensions and to refrain from any further unilateral action or divisive rhetoric that could undermine diplomatic efforts. Positive steps to create an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation and good-neighbourly relations are of the utmost importance.

The normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia remains the only way to ensure security and stability in the region. Dialogue and collaboration are key. That approach would also have a positive effect on the entire Western Balkans. Therefore, we stress the importance of both parties respecting all agreements reached under the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU), including the agreement on the path to the normalization of relations reached in Ohrid last year. We urge them to fulfil their respective obligations under the agreement.

The formation of the association of Serb-majority municipalities will be especially instrumental in the normalization process, and we hope to see work on that advance swiftly in the coming months. That is the only path that leads to EU membership. We once again reiterate that Malta continues to fully support Serbia’s and Kosovo’s EU accession aspirations. To that end, the EU-facilitated dialogue remains of paramount importance. It is crucial that both sides commit to that process and respect it. Any actions of consequence must be duly discussed in a transparent way with all stakeholders and be appropriately negotiated through the EU-facilitated dialogue framework. Moreover, Malta underscores the need for the reform process in Kosovo to continue, with the full participation of various stakeholders from within civil society, including vulnerable and marginalized communities. The full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in the political sphere and the decision-making process must also be at the heart of such efforts.

In conclusion, we urge Kosovo and Serbia to prioritize dialogue and avoid any confrontational actions or decisions that could aggravate the already tense situation in the region. We hope that the coming period will be marked by a meaningful process in the efforts to normalize relations. We call for a serious commitment from both sides to respect their obligations and take tangible steps towards a peaceful and mutually beneficial resolution of the situation.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Ziadeh for her briefing, and I would like to acknowledge President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti.

The United States remains committed to peace and stability in the Western Balkans, including through our support for the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping mission, in line with its United Nations mandate. It is our goal, alongside European partners and other stakeholders, to foster democracy, regional economic integration, vibrant multi-ethnic societies and the rule of law. To that end, we ask both Kosovo and Serbia to refrain from uncoordinated or escalatory actions, and we urge them to return to the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU), which the United States continues to strongly support.

To be clear, it is the EU-facilitated dialogue — not the Security Council — that should be the channel for resolving issues related to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, including solutions that respect the rights of all communities. Still, the United States has expressed concerns with Kosovo's plan for enforcing the amended regulations of the Central Bank of Kosovo on cash transactions. The decision was taken without adequate preparation or consultation with the local population. And so, we once again call for the enforcement of that plan to be immediately postponed until satisfactory procedures, in line with European standards and practices of good governance, are in place, and the affected population has been sufficiently educated on the process that that transition will follow. Interruptions to the distribution of social benefits from Serbia must be minimized until the transition is complete, and we look to the Serbian Government to cooperate in that effort.

We are also deeply concerned about recent, uncoordinated actions the Government of Kosovo has undertaken, including law enforcement operations at the offices of the Serbia-supported institutions

in municipalities in western Kosovo, and the non-governmental organization Centre for Peace and Tolerance in Pristina. Those actions are inconsistent with Kosovo's commitment to work through the EU-facilitated dialogue to address issues that affect the welfare of the Serb minority community, and they undermine the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia. Once again, the Security Council is not the place to resolve those issues; we reiterate our call for both parties to engage through the EU-facilitated dialogue.

But while we are here, we must also draw the Council's attention to acute threats to security and stability coming from outside Kosovo. The United States reiterates its condemnation of the coordinated, violent Serb paramilitary attacks on the Kosovo police near the Banjska Monastery on 24 September, which resulted in the tragic death of a Kosovo police sergeant. Four months have elapsed since that attack, and Serbia has yet to hold accountable those involved in its planning and execution. Indeed, the self-proclaimed leader of the attack remains at large in Serbia. We again call on Serbia to pursue full accountability for the perpetrators and organizers of the 24 September attack. Serbia must also work with KFOR to ensure that another attack like that cannot happen again.

In conclusion, it bears reiterating, one more time, that the EU-facilitated dialogue is the best mechanism to reconcile issues between Kosovo and Serbia and end the cycle of crisis. The agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia and its implementation annex, which both parties agreed to last year, are legally binding commitments, and they serve as a road map for each party to de-escalate tensions and urgently move forward on their respective European paths.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Ziadeh for her briefing today. I also welcome the participation of President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti in our meeting.

Next week marks the nineteenth anniversary of Kosovar independence. The United Kingdom welcomes the progress it has made as a sovereign State in that time. And yet, for many years, the absence of a normal relationship between Kosovo and Serbia has had implications for regional stability and for communities in both countries. Current tensions reinforce the importance of engagement by Kosovo and Serbia with renewed commitment in the dialogue facilitated by the European Union and of the achievement of progress

towards the normalization of relations. The United Kingdom will continue to work in support of that goal, alongside our wider efforts to build regional stability.

Three immediate steps can help support that goal.

First, Kosovo and Serbia should honour their existing commitments and avoid unilateral actions or rhetoric that could reduce prospects of a comprehensive and sustainable normalization agreement.

Secondly, Kosovo should exercise its sovereign powers in a way that is consistent with the vision of a multi-ethnic democracy embedded at the heart of Kosovo's Constitution. Through its recent actions, Kosovo's Central Bank has sought to fulfil its responsibility to regulate the operation of foreign currencies, but the Kosovo Government's implementation of those measures so far has shown insufficient regard for the impact on Kosovo's minority communities. Kosovo's authorities should set out a clear plan to ensure that all Kosovo Serbs affected can continue to receive their incomes and that essential services can operate until a sustainable solution is found.

Finally, the United Kingdom calls on Serbia to ensure that those responsible for the attacks in Banjska in September 2023 are held to account. Regional stability and the interests of all communities are best served by the creation of a conducive environment that will allow further progress under the EU-facilitated dialogue.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome His Excellency President Vučić of Serbia to this meeting. I listened closely to the briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadé and to Mr. Kurti's statement.

The Provisional Institutions of Self-government (PISG) in Pristina recently issued a ban on the Serbian dinar, closed down certain Serbian institutions and violently carried out searches on Serbs in northern Kosovo. Those unilateral actions have had a severe impact on the livelihoods of the Serbs concerned and led to mass panic and tensions, which China finds deeply concerning. The escalation in tensions and inter-ethnic antagonism in Kosovo threatens regional peace and stability and are in the interest of no one. We call on the PISG to show restraint, rescind their unjustified and unreasonable measures and immediately cease and desist from taking any further action that could exacerbate the situation, so that Serbians living in Kosovo can return to their normal lives.

The Kosovo issue has a bearing on the peace and stability in the Balkans and Europe as a whole. China's position on the issue has been consistent. In our view, unilateral actions are neither helpful in resolving the Kosovo issue or conducive to the region's peace and stability. We support the parties in their efforts to reach a mutually acceptable political solution through dialogue within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999). In that process, the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Serbia must be fully respected. And given the fact that various ethnic groups living side by side in Kosovo is rooted in history, the rights of all communities to survival and development should be safeguarded. Tolerance, reconciliation and harmonious coexistence in Kosovo serve the long-term and fundamental interests of all parties. Confrontation and standing in the way of one another have never been — and never will be — the solution. We call on all parties to resolve their differences through pragmatic and constructive dialogue and negotiation and increasingly create the conditions necessary to enable reaching an appropriate settlement of the Kosovo issue.

**Mrs. Blokar Drobič** (Slovenia): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Ms. Caroline Ziadé, for her briefing. We also extend our gratitude to President Vučić of Serbia and Prime Minister Kurti of Kosovo for being here and their statements.

Slovenia is strongly committed to strengthening security and stability in the Western Balkans. Let me voice our position on the following points.

First, both sides need to continue their commitment to the European Union (EU)-facilitated dialogue and the normalization of their relations under the auspices of the EU. We believe that both Serbia and Kosovo have a place in the European Union. Our support for their aspirations for European integration remains unwavering. At the same time, we would like to stress that progress in the dialogue and the normalization of relations are essential if they still aspire to join the EU.

Secondly, we take note of the regulation by the Central Bank of Kosovo aimed at enhancing financial transparency and combating money-laundering. In that regard, we express concern about the potential impact on the financial support for Kosovo Serbs from Serbia. We would advise the Kosovo Government to inform and consult Kosovo Serbs about decisions that affect



their lives before making such decisions. We appreciate recent discussions with Belgrade and Pristina within the EU-facilitated dialogue on the matter. In addition, we take note of Kosovo's recent decision to allow for a transitional period and ensure that the opening of new euro-currency accounts will be free of charge. Kosovo should provide all necessary information and support to ensure a smooth transition. Furthermore, we call on both sides to refrain from any unilateral action that may impede the ongoing efforts towards the normalization of relations.

Thirdly, concerns remain about the slow progress of the report on the attack in Banjska in September 2023. The perpetrators of the attack must be held accountable. We also underscore that violence against Kosovo Force (KFOR) personnel is equally unacceptable. Strengthening an independent judiciary and rule-of-law institutions is crucial to ensuring accountability.

Serbia and Kosovo can work together. We commend their recent agreement on the mutual recognition of vehicle license plates and encourage both sides to take further positive steps. In times of increased tensions, it is imperative for both parties to step back, foster trust and engage through diplomatic means towards reconciliation and peace. The implementation of existing commitments must be swift and without preconditions.

We call on Belgrade and Pristina to implement the agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia and its "implementation annex. That action will be the most productive pathway forward for the well-being of the people in both parties involved.

Lastly, I want to express our gratitude for the work carried out by UNMIK and KFOR.

**Mr. Gaouaoui** (Algeria): I welcome the presence at today's meeting of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, for her briefing.

The recent financial decision taken by Pristina is worrisome, as it could have a negative impact on Serbs living in Kosovo who receive payments, financial assistance and social benefits from Serbia. The unilateral decision, taken without prior consultation with Serbian authorities, may have a severe impact on many hospitals and schools providing essential services to the Serbs living in the region and on the functioning of which depends heavily on Serbia's

funding. Those actions may dangerously raise ethnic tensions and risk further escalation in an already-tense context. They could undermine the fragile stability in Kosovo and might seriously hinder the efforts towards normalization and maintaining peace and security in the region.

Against that backdrop, Algeria would like to deliver three messages.

First, it is urgent to avoid escalation and refrain from any action that may lead to ethnic tensions in Kosovo, as it is urgent to allow for Serbs to receive what is due to them financially without delay or obstruction.

Secondly, restoring trust between the two sides and ensuring the effective representation of Serbs in local institutions is of the utmost importance. Sudden and unilateral measures do not only hinder the stability of the status quo, but could also produce uncontrolled escalation and create the risk of a regional spillover. In that regard, we call on the authorities in Kosovo to undertake the necessary steps and measures to establish the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, as agreed under the 2013 Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations.

Thirdly, we commend the efforts of Special Representative Ziadeh and reiterate the vital role of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo in stabilizing the situation on the ground. We also appreciate the European Union-facilitated dialogue, aimed at advancing the political process towards the peaceful settlement of this conflict, in line with the principle of subsidiarity between the United Nations and regional organizations.

Finally, Algeria believes that constructive and genuine dialogue remains the only viable path and supports all efforts to reach a mutually acceptable solution to the issue within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999), with full respect for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing. I welcome the President of Serbia, Mr. Vučić, and the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Kurti, to today's meeting.

France recalls the need to stabilize the situation on the ground and to work to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which is a central element in European rapprochement for both countries. Both



parties must refrain from any unilateral action that could increase tensions. In that regard, France and the European Union have expressed their serious concern about Kosovo's recent actions regarding its currency and Kosovo police operations, leading to the closure of Serbian structures in the south and east of Kosovo.

These decisions will have negative consequences on the daily life of the Serbian community in Kosovo, in particular on its access to social services. France calls for the immediate suspension of the decision of the Central Bank of Kosovo to allow for a sufficient transition period. Mr. Kurti's statement yesterday, acknowledging that a transition period was necessary, is an initial positive step. It must now be followed by action.

France also recalls that the status of the Serb parallel structures must be resolved exclusively through the establishment of an association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, which has been expected for quite some time. France condemns the attack on Banjska on 24 September 2023 and requests that light be shed on the circumstances surrounding it and that those responsible be brought to justice.

France supports the prospect of European integration for Serbia and Kosovo. No one can deny the sovereign will of both countries to choose the European option. There is no alternative for Serbia or Kosovo other than to find a lasting solution to their differences. It is within the context of the European Union-facilitated dialogue that issues should be resolved. We recall that the General Assembly entrusted the European Union with that mandate.

France welcomes European mediation efforts, which led to the so-called Brussels-Ohrid agreement at the beginning of 2023. It is the most ambitious agreement between the two countries to date. It is a major success, and we must ensure its full implementation.

France commends the progress made in the European Union-facilitated dialogue, in particular on issues such as mutual recognition of license plates, energy and the organization of municipal elections in the north of Kosovo with the participation of Serbs. We welcome the involvement of Serbian authorities in the dialogue, which has led to significant progress. Serbia must continue to make clear progress in implementing its obligations under the Brussels-Ohrid agreement and its annex.

France welcomes the role of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force. Attacks on the latter, such as the one that occurred in May last year, are unacceptable. France will continue to support European Union mediation, aimed at achieving a comprehensive, definitive and legally binding agreement.

Lastly, we call on Serbian leaders and Kosovar leaders to respect their commitments and shoulder their responsibility.

**Mr. Kumanga** (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to thank the Guyanese presidency for convening today's open briefing on the situation in Kosovo. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo for her insights.

My delegation recognizes the presence in the Chamber of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Serbia and of Mr. Kurti.

The facts reported in the letter dated 5 February 2024 (S/2024/134) from the Serbian Government to the presidency of the Security Council are concerning. The facts described, particularly the atrocities against civilians, are regrettable. They are contrary to international law and international humanitarian law.

Mozambique is not in favour of any action, by any actor, that deprives populations of resources for their basic needs and survival. In that regard, we urge the parties to the conflict to measure the impact of their decisions and refrain from any actions that are contrary to the spirit of resolution 1244 (1999) and the Charter of the United Nations.

The promotion of peace and reconciliation in Kosovo and the region at large is of paramount importance. That will contribute to preserving the progress that has been made over the years by the parties. Mozambique commends the diplomatic efforts that led to the agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, which is well-known as the agreement on the path to normalization between Kosovo and Serbia. The agreement is a milestone achievement that was facilitated by the European Union. We see it as a clear example of the central role that regional organizations can play in the promotion of international peace and security. We encourage the European Union to continue engaging with the parties in the implementation of the agreement.

Mozambique calls on the Republic of Serbia and Kosovo to remain fully committed to the process of normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina by promoting meaningful dialogue and avoiding unilateral actions that may further contribute to the escalation of tensions. The framework of the dialogue facilitated by the European Union, based on the 2010 General Assembly resolution 64/298, is one of those constructive paths to achieving peace, security and stability. In particular, we call on the parties to make every effort to find solutions by political and diplomatic means. The participation of key actors and stakeholders, including women, youth and civil society, is important for the success of the reconciliation process. Continued engagement by the international community is also critical in this process of building peace.

Mozambique reiterates its unwavering support to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and to the efforts made by regional actors aimed at promoting peace and stability in Kosovo and Metohija and in the region in general.

**Mr. Iriya** (Japan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziaideh for her briefing. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Security Council to President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti. Japan has built a long-standing friendship with both of their countries. As friends, we are concerned about the current situation in Kosovo. Any actions that could lead to further escalation should be avoided for the sake of the people in the region.

We note the recent regulation of the Central Bank of Kosovo on cash operations. That measure was implemented as part of the fight against counterfeit money and money laundering to ensure transparency of cash flows in Kosovo. Nonetheless, we are concerned about the impact of that regulation on the everyday lives of the many Kosovo Serbs who use the Serbian currency and may therefore be disadvantaged. We understand that Kosovo, as a sovereign nation, requires such measures. However, policies that directly affect the lives of citizens should not be rushed into, but rather approached with full and transparent communication. In that regard, we echo the messages coming from the Quint Embassies and other members of the international community to Kosovo to proceed with caution in order to avoid increasing tensions by addressing the impact of the regulation.

We take this opportunity to reiterate that the normalization of relations between the two countries through the European Union-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue will contribute to peace and stability in the Western Balkans. In that regard, the issues raised today should also be discussed further in the framework of that dialogue.

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

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for her briefing. I welcome Their Excellencies President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti to the Chamber. Their presence here today demonstrates the importance they place on this discussion. In this current period of tensions, we call for words and actions of caution and restraint.

That call reflects Switzerland's deep commitment to peace in the Western Balkans. For a quarter of a century, we have been working alongside various national and international actors to achieve peace, which includes reconciliation and the easing of inter-ethnic relations. Progress has been made in terms of coexistence. However, that progress is now threatened by deep-seated tensions, and the attack in Banjska last September raised those tensions to a new level. Switzerland reiterates its support for the Kosovo Force, which has prevented the situation from deteriorating further. We call on Serbia to support efforts to ensure that those involved in the Banjska attacks are held accountable.

De-escalation efforts must urgently continue. Serbia and Kosovo have a responsibility to refrain from measures and actions that could exacerbate the situation. Paths exist for rebuilding trust: the European Union-facilitated dialogue is the framework in which both parties can and must address contentious issues. That includes the issues that have brought us together today, namely, the implementation of the new regulation introduced by the Central Bank of Kosovo.

Switzerland acknowledges the legitimacy of the objectives of the regulation, notably, to ensure the transparency of financial flows and combat counterfeiting and money laundering. However, we

share concerns about the communication of the Bank's decision, and especially about its implementation in the short-term. When actions are carried out without coordination with the people they affect, that can be perceived as a deliberately restrictive measure towards a particular ethnic group, which can undermine trust. The announcement by the Kosovar Government and the Central Bank of Kosovo of a planned transitional period, along with enhanced communication, is therefore commendable. Switzerland calls on the Kosovo authorities to implement those commitments and to promptly strengthen dialogue with the Serbian population of Kosovo, who are directly affected by the regulation.

Greater efforts by Kosovo and Serbia are required in order to find compromise. Above all, both parties are required to implement their commitments under the Brussels Agreement and the Ohrid agreement of 2023 with a view to building good-neighbourly relations. We welcome the progress made in that regard, including the mutual recognition of vehicle license plates, as well as the steps taken towards the implementation of the energy agreements. We encourage both parties to continue along that path and to make good-faith progress towards normalizing their relations. Switzerland is ready to continue to contribute to the normalization process. We remain firmly convinced that that process constitutes the path towards peaceful and prosperous multi-ethnic societies.

**Mr. Cho** (Republic of Korea): I too thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziakeh for her briefing. My delegation also warmly welcomes President Aleksandar Vučić and Prime Minister Albin Kurti to the Security Council.

When Serbia and Kosovo agreed to resume negotiations to normalize relations based on the proposal in February of last year by the European Union (EU), it was welcomed by international community, including the Republic of Korea. Korea hopes for reconciliation, peace and prosperity in the region, which has experienced a turbulent and heartbreaking history in modern times. Indeed, we all hoped and expected that last year's agreement would lead to a resolution of the long-standing confrontation and conflict in the region through the lessening of tensions and the advancement of critical dialogue. However, it is regrettable that the parties have not made significant progress to date on the implementation of the agreement on the path to normalization. Rather, the situation in the northern

region of Kosovo, where more than 100,000 ethnic Serbian residents live, is worsening owing to sporadic incidents that are compounding tensions on the ground.

The recent regulation of the Central Bank of Kosovo on currency transactions constitutes a cause for concern in terms of its impact, even if we acknowledge that it is intended to enhance financial stability and transparency in Kosovo. The implementation of the regulation could have a direct and negative impact on the ability of Serbian residents of Kosovo to lead their daily lives and access basic social services. The Republic of Korea welcomes the decision of Kosovo to suspend the implementation of the regulation. In addition, my delegation believes that such issues should be faithfully discussed further within the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue.

The Republic of Korea supports a peaceful resolution of issues related to Kosovo and Serbia through political dialogue and negotiations. We reiterate our support for the EU's efforts and its role in the mediation. In that connection, we also call on the two sides to refrain from provocative statements and unilateral actions, take concrete steps to reduce tensions and build trust in the region and to actively participate in EU-led negotiations with a view to normalizing relations.

Lastly, my delegation commends the entire staff of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and other key international partners for their tireless efforts to ensure peace and stability in the region.

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. Let me also thank Ms. Caroline Ziakeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for her informative briefing. I acknowledge the presence of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, and Mr. Albin Kurti. I welcome their participation in this meeting under rules 37 and 39 respectively, of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council.

Sierra Leone commends the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for its continued engagement with all relevant actors in the promotion of security, stability, the rule of law and respect for human rights in Kosovo and the region in line with its mandate.

Sierra Leone wishes to underscore the need for the political authorities in Kosovo and Serbia, as appropriate, to take all necessary measures to de-escalate rising tensions within the territory of Kosovo. Consistent with the provisions of resolution 1244 (1999) and the general principles on a political solution to the Kosovo situation, adopted as annex 1 to that resolution on 6 May 1999, Sierra Leone calls on the political leadership of Kosovo and Serbia to constructively engage in dialogue to ensure the attainment of critical institutional reforms to engender peace and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo and the advancement of regional stability in the Western Balkans.

Promoting intercommunity trust-building, respect for human rights and the rule of law, gender equality and the empowerment of women and youth is critical in resolving any conflict or rising tensions.

With respect to the current political tension associated with the decision of the authorities in Kosovo to phase out the Serbian dinar currency, used by Kosovo's Serbian minority, Sierra Leone welcomes the announcement to suspend the implementation of that decision. The suspension will allow for the necessary dialogue and engagement on critical issues. Such an approach is necessary to de-escalate tensions, to discourage actions that will lead to conflict and to facilitate national reconciliation, which is critical for the maintenance of peace and security and the well-being of all segments of the Kosovo population.

Durable peace and security can be secured only through dialogue leading to compromise. In that regard, we take note of the European Union-facilitated dialogue to establish conditions for the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Sierra Leone counts on the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIK and the European Union-facilitated dialogue, as well as the mediation overtures of other stakeholders to work concertedly towards normalizing relations between the parties.

We urge the political leadership of both parties to commit to the implementation of the 2013 Brussels First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations and the European Union-brokered proposal of 27 February 2023, which outline the path for the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, as well as the annex to that agreement agreed on 18 March 2023. Sierra Leone encourages the

parties to work together to mutually address the issues heightening suspicion and division among different segments of the communities in Kosovo.

To achieve that outcome, we encourage the authorities to take the necessary measures to maintain viable channels of communication. We affirm the call on political leaders on both sides to embark on initiatives aimed at addressing critical issues that can reduce tensions and to take all necessary steps to address the security, political and socioeconomic concerns of all segments of society. That must be the case regardless of ethnic, linguistic or political background. The political authorities have the overall responsibility to foster purposeful and concerted actions towards sustainable peace.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone calls on the political leadership in Kosovo and Serbia to exercise caution and restraint in order to defuse tensions and pursue the path of dialogue to attain the peaceful resolution of all disputed issues. As a post-conflict country, Sierra Leone has shown that peace can be achieved through dialogue, compromise and mutual understanding. As Albert Einstein observed: "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding".

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Representative Ziadeh for her detailed briefing. I welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and I also acknowledge the presence of Mr. Kurti.

Discord of various kinds and the series of incidents that have hindered the dialogue process between Belgrade and Pristina are public, which has negatively affected communities in the region. The measure providing for the exclusive use of the euro in financial transactions, eliminating the use of the Serbian dinar in areas predominantly inhabited by ethnic Serbs, has raised a series of questions among the international community, particularly due to its possible impact on institutions related to public service, such as schools and hospitals, as well as on the basic rights of the communities involved in various ways.

Consequently, I wish to highlight the importance of addressing humanitarian and security concerns affecting the populations of the region, in line with the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 1244 (1999). In that context, it is also essential to avoid actions or rhetoric that could



exacerbate tensions or contribute to instability in the region. The protection of the rights and well-being of all communities must be a priority. As has been underscored by the Secretary-General, to achieve viable and sustainable agreements, both parties must maintain an open, transparent and inclusive process that takes into account the diverse needs and expectations of all stakeholders, including women, young people and civil society actors.

I reiterate Ecuador's recognition of the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo in favour of dialogue and the maintenance of stability in the region, in coordination with international partners. We value its commitment to respecting and protecting the human rights of all communities, including through the principle of equality and non-discrimination.

Finally, Ecuador encourages the resolution of pending issues within the framework of the dialogue facilitated by the European Union and for the parties to comply with their commitments, including the creation of an association of Serb-majority municipalities. The stability of the Western Balkans is crucial for European and global security, and therefore an escalation of tensions must be avoided.

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

I thank Special Representative Ziadeh, Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, for her insightful briefing. I also welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and His Excellency Mr. Albin Kurti, Prime Minister of Kosovo, and their respective delegations at today's meeting.

Guyana is deeply troubled by the rising tensions and incidents that have been reported and calls on all parties to take steps to bring about calm and to return to active dialogue in the interest of ensuring stability for the peoples of both Kosovo and Serbia, as well as the wider region. We are also concerned about the recent events in Kosovo and their possible negative consequences on the lives and well-being of members of the ethnic Serb minority community in Kosovo. It is imperative that all parties act responsibly and in a manner that respects the human rights of all. Guyana underscores the importance of promoting policies that are responsive to the needs and concerns of all persons, including ethnic minorities.

We welcome the efforts by the European Union (EU) in facilitating the ongoing dialogue between the parties and believe that that mechanism remains a critical avenue for ensuring the achievement of a final resolution that will allow all the people of Kosovo and of Serbia to live side by side in peace and prosperity. While we were encouraged by the progress made early last year through the dialogue, we are deeply concerned by the ongoing gridlock and possible reversal in advancements towards the implementation of the agreed provisions of the February 2023 agreement on the path to normalization.

Guyana supports a multi-ethnic, democratic Kosovo that receives international recognition and that can become a full member of the international multilateral system. That can be achieved only through renewed commitment to the EU-led Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and through Kosovo's dedication to the enforcement of principles of democracy, the protection of the human rights of all its population and respect for the rule of law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

President Vučić has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor and respectfully ask that his second intervention be brief.

**President Vučić:** I will be as brief as possible. First of all, I thank everyone for participating in this discussion. I would like to emphasize a few facts.

First, I want to say that Serbia will do everything possible to keep peace, stability and tranquillity in the region, as we have always done. I believe I referred to real facts and arguments without ad hominem ad personam insults, scoffing and scolding, and I will continue to do so.

Speaking about alleged facts that were mentioned here about Serbia supporting counterfeiting, money laundering, criminal activities and everything else, I will depict for the Council the situation using one example, and everything will be very clear. It was said here that Serbs are bringing in sacks of cash through administrative lines or, as some would say, the border lines between Serbia and Kosovo, and that is how we make a big impact on criminals in the north of Kosovo or in the other areas of Kosovo. For the Council's information, we know does it. We know who brings in sacks. It is not Serbs, but British. It is not



us. Henderson Asset Protection is an authorized and specialized company. Do not worry — they are doing a legal job. We pay them; we engaged a British company. They transfer our money to Kosovo in those sacks. I am letting the Council see how transparent we are.

The British, as the Council is aware, has already recognized Kosovo's independence. When the Council speaks about suspension and says things about suspension of the implementation or the abolishment of the dinar, I need to tell the Council that is not true at all. That is for our friends from Korea, Sierra Leone and elsewhere, who just mentioned that here. They stopped the cars that were run by the Henderson company and that were bringing money for pensions, salaries and, of course, social beneficiaries as well.

Secondly, the Council heard — and it is good that some people, as citizens of Serbia, wanted to speak about Serbian democratic life — that we were torturing and paralyzing the opposition leader in Serbia. The name of the man, as they said, is Mr. Sandulović. No one in Serbia has ever heard of that participant in political life in Serbia. He once participated in elections and got 0.01 per cent. Those are facts.

Turning to the real issues, most of those countries that are not in adherence with the Charter of the United Nations and resolution 1244 (1999) have recognized Kosovo's independence. They have tried to find a sufficient excuse and justification for everything that Pristina was doing and the fact that something happened on 24 September 2023, which we as a State condemned. But someone has to explain what really happened and why that was not mentioned in my intervention.

First of all, it is not good that we did not hear anything about the attempts to kill Serbian kids because they were carrying a Christmas tree, and some other people as well. The Council needs to know that 10 months before that case, we were negotiating with the European Union and the United States of America. We tried — we begged Serbs to leave, to remove themselves from the barricades they had raised, because of constant, systematic and systemic attacks made by Pristina against them. I myself was receiving guarantees from the United States of America and the European Union and was trying to convince Kosovo Serbs to accept those guarantees. They came to that meeting and said to me: “we believe you, but we do not believe them. They are going to violate the guarantees. They are going to forget everything, and we are going

to be hunted like wild hares”. And I said to them: “I cannot get more. We need to believe our American and European partners”. They said to me: “we will do it, but we still do not believe that they will respect or obey what they promised to us”.

As a matter of fact, three months after that, Pristina authorities started hunting Serbs who were erecting those barricades. That was one of the reasons that those people who had been born and were living their entire lives in Kosovo wanted to defend their own homes, their own families. Did they do it rightfully? I do not believe that, but the Council needs to know the real reasons. After that, we started the process of investigation, and we will have indictments. But someone has to understand that, according to the United Nations Charter and resolution 1244 (1999), the only territorial integrity that has been violated is Serbia's territorial integrity. There are no other countries whose territorial integrity has been violated.

Finally, I need to thank the 109 countries within the United Nations that did not recognize Kosovo's independence — the 109 nations in the world that stick to the United Nations Charter and resolution 1244 (1999). It was mentioned here that Serbia is an extension of the hand of Russia. As the proud President of Serbia, I say to everyone here — and, as members can see, I can look easily into the eyes of Council members — that Serbia is an independent, sovereign, freedom-loving country. We are not puppets of anyone — either of the United States of America or Russia or any other country in the world. And that will remain so. That is why I am so proud to have seen our beautiful flag hoisted here in front of this building of the United Nations. I thank the Council once again for listening to me and for giving me an opportunity to speak.

**The President:** Mr. Kurti has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor and also respectfully ask that he keeps his intervention brief.

**Mr. Kurti:** The dinar has not been banned in Kosova. Serbian citizens — and not only them — can have dinars. They can own dinars; however, the euro is the only currency that can be used as a means of payment. In the previous century, before liberation, we had the dinar as a means of payment. That was when we were under occupation. In the twenty-first century, first, we had the deutsche mark, the German mark; and then afterwards, the euro. The euro is the only means of payment. We have provided so many subsidies and

so much social assistance. We give grants for education and health care to Serb-majority municipalities. And believe me, they all take euros with no problem. We do not have a single case in which a Serbian citizen of Kosova said, "I do not want this money because it is in euro currency."

In our neighbouring country, Montenegro, over a quarter of the population declare themselves Serbs. Their currency is the euro. Ordinary Serbs are not euro haters. The euro is the currency of payment. One can have money in whatever currency one wants. And I will communicate more and provide more information to Serbs in the coming days throughout this month. And I will speak in Serbian, so they understand me better and clearly. We who were under the occupation of Serbia knew the Serbian language, but they did not learn our language, because we were oppressed and dominated. As Council members know, throughout the world there are similar cases in which the colonizer does not know the language of the colonized, but the colonized knows the language of the colonizer. I will speak in Serbian and say that I have nothing against Serbs. I have friends who are Serbs. I have a Minister who is a Serb, Nenad Rašić. His Deputy, Radoica Radimirović, is a Serb. Deputy Ombudsman of Kosova, Sergjan Sentiq, is a Serb. My party in Parliament, with a secret ballot, voted in Sergjan Sentiq as Deputy Ombudsman of Kosova. I have appointed, as one of four members of the Board of Trepča, which is the biggest company for mines and minerals, Dragiša Krstović of Leposavić, a Serb and a great lawyer.

I do not believe that ethnic differences bring conflict. On the contrary, diversity and multiplicity is the state of being. However, for political and economic interests, ethnic differences can be employed, and we are fighting that.

I am a Social Democrat who believes in people and thinks that people are good. Criminals are individuals. No community is a criminal community. I want to be very clear about that. There are such things as criminal structures, but a community and a people are never criminal. And I do not equate States with people. We need States, but I believe that people are always even better than States. And I want to communicate and cooperate with Serbs in Kosova. But we also need the Central Bank of Kosova to communicate and cooperate with the National Bank of Serbia. We wrote a letter to it. I hope we will get an answer.

Believe me, converting vehicle licence plates from KM into RKS was much more difficult, because with the RKS licence plates of our Republic you have "R" for the Republic. It was total conversion. They switched Serbian licence plates with Kosovar plates. "Republic of Kosova" is not on the euro at all. Therefore, switching from dinars to euros as a means of payment, to have a faster and smoother conversion, is much easier and more logical than switching licence plates.

There are four branches of commercial banks in the northern part of Kosova. We have 10 commercial banks — eight are foreign, two are Kosovar — and four of the 10 commercial banks have branches in the north which can be used for exchange. And there are 15 additional financial non-banking institutions for conversion.

I have been criticized for unilateral action, but I am a Prime Minister because Kosova is a Republic. If my country had not been a Republic, I would not have become a Prime Minister. Therefore, I defend the interests of a democratic Republic. For bilateral action — in contrast to unilateral action — let us sign the agreement that we have agreed upon as a text. Mr. Vučić and I agreed on a text, on 27 February last year in Brussels, and an implementation annex, in Ohrid, North Macedonia, on 18 March 2023. Therefore, yes, we are committed to dialogue. However, we already have an agreement. In order not to have a violation of that agreement, in order to respect and implement it, I am saying, let us take bilateral action which would be signing the agreement, so that we adhere, with our signing, to the spirit and the letter of it.

In this Chamber, we have heard a critique, an opposition to NATO intervention, which saved my people. Twenty-five years ago, 19 countries got together to stop the genocide of Milošević's forces in Kosova; 19 countries got together to bomb a European country. It must have been very bad. Otherwise, it would not have happened. Sometimes 19 countries cannot agree on a press release. How come, in 1999, 19 countries agreed to bomb Milošević's Yugoslavia? It was very bad, and even then President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin knew how bad the situation in Kosova was. He was talking to former United States President Bill Clinton several times per week trying to find a peaceful solution. It was very bad in my country. NATO interventions saved us. Milošević died in The Hague facing trial, not waiting for the sentence. Therefore, I understand that some Council members oppose NATO intervention, but

they would have had to be in my country in the spring of 1999 to understand what kind of grave situation we were in. It was a humanitarian catastrophe.

The International Court of Justice gave an advisory opinion on 22 July 2010 and said that the declaration of independence of Kosova did not violate international law (see A/64/881). All Security Council resolutions are part of international law. On our planet, there is no higher court than the International Court of Justice, and the International Court of Justice said that the declaration of independence of Kosova did not violate international law. International law also includes resolution 1244 (1999). Therefore, the legal debate on the justification of our independence is basically over.

The last thing I want to mention is that on the front pages of all Serbian tabloids these days we see fantasies of Kosovars taking revenge on Serbs. We are not going to take revenge. Yes, more than 10,000 unarmed civilians were killed; 20,000 women were

raped. But we are not going to take revenge. I want justice, and justice is justice by not being revenge. It is therefore very important to emphasize that, in order to have peace between Kosova and Serbia — normal relations — they have to quit fantasizing that we are going to take revenge. We are not going to take revenge. I am a Prime Minister who will guarantee that there will be no revenge, only justice, in spite of the background of the perpetrators — whether they commit their crimes during the war or after it during the peace for political motives or economic ones.

**The President:** I note that President Vučić is asking for the floor. The presidency indicated to both parties that they would have one further statement each. We request that we abide by that, if the parties are so inclined.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

*The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.*