



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9019th meeting

Wednesday, 20 April 2022, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Kariuki	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. Coraiola Yinde Kloss
	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	France	Mr. Benaabou
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	India	Mr. Sharma
	Ireland	Mr. Gallagher
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
	Norway	Ms. Syed
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

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

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2022/313)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

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

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2022/313)

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. Nikola Selaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz 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/2022/313, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ziadeh.

Ms. Ziadeh: I am honoured to be here today, as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), to thank the Council for its ongoing support and to brief it on the Mission's operations during the past six months, taking account of developments in the region since the end of the official reporting period. As I brief the Council today, developments in Ukraine inevitably have influenced and will continue to influence all issues of European security, including in the Mission's area of operations.

I am also briefing the Council today on the heels of the Serbian elections, conducted on 3 April. Although the final results are pending, the overall

outcome is clear. The current majority party in Serbia retains a secure public mandate. It is worth noting that the ruling coalition in Pristina also currently enjoys a comfortable majority in Parliament. Such circumstances can sometimes lend themselves to courageous leadership decisions.

In the lead-up to the Serbian general elections, the international community had urged the Pristina and Belgrade authorities to agree on modalities to facilitate eligible voters' participation in Kosovo. That would have been in line with the practice of preceding years. This time, a solution was not identified to permit that. Together with my international colleagues and the representatives of various Member States, I regretted the polarizing effects of that decision, since it divided public opinion sharply along ethnic lines.

Nevertheless, more than 19,000 voters from Kosovo did participate by casting their vote at special polling stations established in Serbia. Thanks to an impressive logistical exercise facilitated by support from both sides, the election process went smoothly and without incident.

The resilience of democratic institutions throughout the Balkans region is a crucial factor in the maintenance of a secure and democratic Europe. Earlier this month, I met with the re-elected President of Serbia as well as other Government leaders in Belgrade. I was encouraged by the very direct and open conversations I had there.

Unfortunately, incidents of serious concern took place only a few days ago in northern Kosovo, with attacks apparently directly targeting Kosovo police patrols. Gunshots were fired at the patrols, and stones and pyrotechnic devices were thrown. While the motive is yet unknown, those criminal attacks were brazen. I have urged the public at large and officials on all sides to join in condemning such violence and to provide any information they may have to law enforcement so that those responsible are swiftly identified and brought to justice.

Today I wish to call upon the leaders of both Pristina and Belgrade to be very judicious in their actions and in their political rhetoric. During such complex days, those leaders bear the main responsibility for reducing tensions rather than fuelling them. That applies at the political level and, equally, in the public arena. For those reasons, I have also urged both sides to engage constructively and more actively in the

dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU). I received reassurances of that commitment during my recent meetings.

I have yet to be provided the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister or the President in Pristina. That is of course an important prerequisite for constructive and positive engagement. However, I met with most leaders from across the political spectrum in Pristina, including those of the parties in power, those in opposition and political independents. I will also regularly reach out to leaders in other parts of the Balkan neighbourhood to hear their perspectives on relations with Kosovo and on the dialogue. I am sure that the political actors in the region will demonstrate in deeds their understanding that dialogue and compromise represent the only viable path towards stability, prosperity and security for all.

Yesterday marked the ninth anniversary of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. While that process has led to meaningful results on various practical matters, a comprehensive normalization of relations between the two sides so far continues to be elusive.

Even on extremely technical subjects discussed during this reporting period, such as vehicle registration plates, progress remains tentative and slow. As we meet here today, we cannot be sure whether Belgrade and Pristina will achieve an agreed solution with regard to that matter by tomorrow's deadline. I would like to encourage Pristina and Belgrade to proactively seek a permanent solution to the vehicle licence issue, along with other issues concerning freedom of movement, as well as energy agreements. Whatever the pace of discussions — which we hope will increase — another principle bears re-emphasizing. However difficult the path towards agreements and solutions, unilateral actions by any side have the potential to damage the real interests of the people of both sides.

Dramatic shocks to Kosovo's and other regional economies were building up well before the onset of events in Ukraine. Following two years of the global coronavirus disease pandemic, economies have been struggling to first manage and then recover from that disease's profound effects on health, as well as social and economic well-being. Inflation, supply shortages, rising interest rates and increasing debt burdens were already occurring and have since been exacerbated. In that context, finding practical modes of economic cooperation among Belgrade, Pristina and all the neighbours of the region assumes greater

urgency. Any region-wide initiatives that can help towards promoting that objective should be welcomed. Reducing restrictions on the movement of people and flows of goods and capital can only help all neighbours in the region, whether with respect to current or future challenges.

Since my arrival in Pristina, I have witnessed first-hand the internal and external challenges that weigh on Kosovo's political leadership. The expectations for progress and reform are exceptionally high. The current Government will depend upon both wise decision-making and strong international support to fulfil its ambitious agenda and to deliver for the people.

It is therefore logical that the subject of improving relationships sits at the top of the agenda for so many of Kosovo's regional and international interlocutors. Reconciliation and addressing the grievances of the past should reinforce the pursuit of important strategic objectives.

At the outset of my mandate, allow me to be very clear about two important points.

First, as Belgrade and Pristina each know well, my responsibility is to provide objective information to the Secretary-General and the Security Council. I will always remain open to listening to all views. However, the contents of the Secretary-General's reports are not the subject of negotiation.

Secondly, UNMIK is not a determining factor or the spokesperson of any particular view regarding a just and lasting settlement between the parties. That is not our role. Too often since my arrival, I have heard insinuations that UNMIK, in and of itself, represents either an obstacle or a vehicle for the outcome preferred by one or the other side or that UNMIK itself harbours a particular agenda to forward or favour outside the bounds of its mandate, which is to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo. That is the mandate. Neither of those inaccurate perceptions contains any demonstrable truth; yet both have too frequently been allowed to gain currency in local public discourse.

Accordingly, we will continue our work in the areas where we are genuinely able to help to advance the common objectives held by the authorities, communities and institutions in Kosovo. UNMIK's legacy of institutional support, its trust among communities and political actors and its work with the full spectrum of multilateral and bilateral actors will

drive my Mission's agenda. Naturally, that includes working in synergy with the United Nations family of agencies, funds and programmes and in partnership with the international community.

Progress in high-level political discussions, in particular the EU-facilitated dialogue, can be supported and aided by intensified people-to-people work on the ground. My Mission remains a locus of relevant knowledge, experience and subject area expertise, which serves Kosovo's institutions and communities. Supporting an active civil society, promoting new tools to help Kosovo reinforce the rule of law, contributing to the empowerment of women and young people and providing expertise and support to human rights mechanisms will all remain major priorities. Of course, we will continue to explore all areas where we can make fruitful contributions under the mandate that the Security Council gave us.

I wish to conclude by saying that the Security Council's support for our Mission remains essential. Equally important is its attention to the state of relations between Pristina and Belgrade, even though we realize that many new and difficult situations demand its attention. Our efforts, as a mission, will remain focused on contributing to stability, political progress, respect for human rights, supporting the women and peace and security and youth and peace and security agendas and creating and promoting greater inter-community trust and dialogue in Kosovo and in the region.

On behalf of all the Mission staff, I thank the Security Council for its continuing support to UNMIK.

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

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia.

Mr. Selaković (Serbia): I have the great honour to address this body once again on the occasion of the consideration of most recent report of the Secretary-General on the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (S/2022/313) in the territory of our southern province, Kosovo and Metohija.

I would like to emphasize once again that the Republic of Serbia sees the engagement of UNMIK as one of the key factors for maintaining peace and security in Kosovo and Metohija.

The situation in Kosovo and Metohija is far from normal and stable. In that part of our country, citizens

of Serbian nationality, as well as other non-Albanians, are still distressed and facing each new day with great apprehension, because they are uncertain if their fundamental human rights will be violated or denied. Such feelings are a reaction to the instability generated by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina. The goal of Pristina, based on everything we have been witnessing on the ground, is to have even more Serbs and other non-Albanians leave Kosovo and Metohija and to terminate any form of cultural and national diversity.

The report on the work of UNMIK that we are considering today provides an overview of the situation, with a description of the events that marked the reporting period. We would like the report to be more elaborate and explicit when it comes to the assessment of events and their causes, so that we can examine the developments in Kosovo and Metohija more comprehensively and in their true light.

There are evident problems in Kosovo and Metohija, and it is necessary to precisely identify the causes in order to solve them. Creating an artificial balance and putting a sign of equality between two sides when looking at crisis situations does not contribute in any way whatsoever to reaching a substantial solution to the problem. Unless we clearly define the causes of the problems, they will recur and become more complex.

For all persons living in Kosovo and Metohija, it is extremely important to send a message from this meeting to those who have the authority in their hands and who have the capacity to change the situation for the better. That message should point to the need to establish inter-ethnic trust by having the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina respect the agreements reached, implement what was agreed and harmonize their actions with international standards regarding the rule of law and human rights.

On 16 January, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina, contrary to resolution 1244 (1999), as well as to all democratic principles, banned the organization of a referendum in Kosovo and Metohija on amending the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in the field of the judiciary. Despite the great efforts of international actors, including the countries of the Quint and the European Union, to ensure that this does not happen, Pristina repeated that illegal act and made it impossible to organize the presidential and parliamentary elections of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija on 3 April. We note that this was the first

time since 1999 that citizens in Kosovo and Metohija were prevented from participating in the elections of the Republic of Serbia, which was a violation, among other things, of the clearly defined mandate of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe mission regarding the organization of elections. By doing so, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina once again demonstrated their discriminatory character and sent a message that unilateralism is the principle on which they act.

In the same way — that is, unilaterally — on 20 September, the Provisional Institutions deployed special police units with armoured vehicles at two administrative crossings to central Serbia, which confiscated the license plates of vehicles from the north of Kosovo and Metohija and central Serbia. The manner in which that was done showed that their goal was clearly to intimidate Serbs from the north of the province, and what resulted as a consequence was a justified revolt of the local population.

The Serbs who are victims of such actions do not find the wounds to be as painful as the terror that is carried out daily by Pristina against the Serbian people, both south and north of the Ibar River. I have just quoted the words of Srećko Sofronijević, from the town of Zvečan in Kosovo and Metohija, uttered while he was lying in a hospital bed. On 13 October, members of the special police shot him in the back with a firearm when they made an incursion into the north of the province for the ninth time, contrary to the Brussels Agreement — that is, illegally. We would have preferred that his name had been included in the report we are discussing today.

Fear of uncertainty among Serbs and other non-Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija is also caused by the work done by the judiciary, which acts on secret indictments, contrary to all international standards. The sad reality is that today in Kosovo and Metohija, if you are a Serb, you can be sentenced to many years in prison on the basis of unverified or contradictory witness statements without irrefutable and unambiguous material evidence. That indicates the practice of passing judgments according to ethnicity, not according to law and justice.

The malignant nationalism of the authorities in Pristina is manifested through the ignoring of the political representatives of Serbs in institutions, thereby making decisions without their participation, and the readiness to permanently remove the leaders of the Serb community through politically motivated

investigations and judicial proceedings. That creates an atmosphere of complete insecurity and leads to the exodus of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija. To illustrate that, let me remind Council members of the events in the municipality of Štrpce on 21 December 2021, in which 11 Serbs were arrested, including former mayor and Vice-President of the Serb List, Bratislav Nikolić, who is still in custody under the alleged fight against corruption. On that same occasion, the employees in the municipality were informed that they were to no longer go to work, which jeopardized the existence of dozens of Serbian families.

Pristina has been openly saying for a long time that the establishment of the community of Serb municipalities, envisaged by the Brussels Agreement, signed nine years ago, will not be allowed. That not only undermines the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, but also directly humiliates international actors, primarily the European Union. With such statements, Pristina sends a message to the Serbian people in the province that they should not count on the exercise of collective rights and that such disenfranchisement should ultimately lead to Serbs disappearing entirely from Kosovo and Metohija.

Unfortunately, there are still many ethnically motivated incidents, hate speech, intimidation, violations of the right to a fair trial, threatening the right to freedom of movement and religious rights, the desecration of churches, monasteries and cemeteries. Instead of my spending a good part of Council members' precious time listing them, a non-paper was distributed to them detailing the recorded incidents against Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija during the reporting period.

The number and nature of incidents — in the reporting period alone there were 63, according to our records — unequivocally speaks of the high degree of threat and exposure to continuous discrimination against the Serb and other non-Albanian population. The cause-and-effect relationship between the issue of the return of displaced persons and the number of incidents on ethnic grounds is obvious. In such conditions, the reasons why there are still more than 200,000 internally displaced Serbs and other non-Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija in the Republic of Serbia are easy to understand. We are convinced that it is in that context, in particular, that UNMIK could and should play an important role.

We welcome the Secretary-General's call for enabling the return of internally displaced persons.

To that end, concrete measures are needed to ensure, inter alia, the safety of returnees and full respect for the property rights of displaced persons. We did not get the impression that the institutions in Pristina have the political will to change the situation for the better. We are witnessing the opposite. Serbs are intimidated in various ways and encouraged to leave their homes, and displaced persons are discouraged from returning to their places of birth. Such a practice is not in line with the values and principles publicly proclaimed by Pristina.

We would like to see clear political will and measures to prove that discrimination on national grounds is not a desirable social value in Kosovo and Metohija and that coexistence is possible and necessary. The fastest and most efficient way to do that is to respect valid international legal documents and concluded agreements.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia will continue to constantly draw the attention of the international community to the problems in Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia is committed to respect for international law and the full implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), which includes further UNMIK engagement and the presence of the Kosovo Force as a guarantor of peace and security. It is equally important that these international missions continue to operate in an undiminished capacity, taking into account what has been said in today's debate.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz: I am honoured to be here as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of my country, the Republic of Kosovo.

Today's meeting is taking place in a new era in Europe and in the world. The Europe that existed before the Russian invasion of Ukraine is no more. By destroying the post-war era, Russia is endangering the United Nations as well.

Therefore, our debate today cannot not be only about the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) because it also needs to take those fundamental changes into account. Regarding the presence of the United Nations in the Republic of Kosovo, I can report only that all United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees, UN-Women and many others are highly respected and appreciated in Kosovo.

However, when we talk about UNMIK, it is an entirely different story. UNMIK is not an administrative mission because Kosovo has a Government. UNMIK is not a peacekeeping mission because Kosovo's law enforcement and the Kosovo Force guarantee the safety and security of our people. Basically, UNMIK no longer plays a role in the lives of our citizens and our country. I believe that this, in itself, is quite an encouraging development. It proves that Kosovo, a sovereign State, is fulfilling its obligations towards its citizens and is a reliable and responsible counterpart for our partners in Europe and the world.

We are glad that we could foster and extend our relationships with other countries — not only in Europe, but also in Africa, Asia and America, especially in recent months. We are proud that the Republic of Kosovo is respected — not only at home, but also in many European countries and beyond — as a vivid democracy with huge potential for the future. Fourteen years after Kosovo's independence, our Republic is a globally established and recognized reality. Our country can count on many friends and partners in the region and around the globe. The vast majority of European Union and NATO countries recognize our independence and support our goals to become a member of NATO, the European Union and the United Nations.

The Republic of Kosovo enjoys robust democratic, political and economic spheres. Yet, like all other countries, we have been hit by the pandemic and by the recent energy and food crisis. In the most recent period, Kosovo allocated resources to assist citizens and businesses. After electing a new Government in a landslide victory last year, Kosovo has reached a phase of a more transparent democracy committed to tackling organized crime and ensuring the rule of law.

Today, our citizens have trust and hope in us, the Government and our country. That trust translates into outstanding success in other areas. Economic growth in Kosovo in 2021 reached more than 10 per cent — one of the biggest increases in Europe last year. We registered a significant increase in budget revenues by more than 30 per cent, and our foreign direct investments over the past two years have increased significantly — by more than 65 per cent.

The trust of citizens is a very hard currency, in any country. Our Government enjoys great trust from our

people, but also faces high expectations. Its work is challenging, but is paying off and is benefiting us all. Thanks to our fight against corruption and organized crime, Kosovo jumped up 17 places in Transparency International's 2021 report. We are glad, grateful and proud that this Government can rely on public support for our reforms. I am honoured when decision-makers from abroad tell us that Kosovo has become a role model for democracy and rule of law in our region. We will continue to uphold and strengthen those values.

Allow me to be clear that Kosovo's independence is not a result of a secessionist movement. Our country was born out of the genocide committed by Serbia. Kosovo had long resisted peacefully, non-violently, until we were forced to defend our families and lives in a brutal war. At the end, NATO came and rescued us. Kosovo survived Serbia's openly declared attempt of extinction. Today we are an example for all victims of aggression and genocide that justice will always prevail in the end. Our people made their choice long ago. We are part of the West, while Serbia, our northern neighbour, remains Russia's satellite. That is quite unique in modern Europe and shows the main reason why our region remains unstable.

In 1999, in just 18 months 15,000 people out of 1.9 million were brutally killed, 20,000 women raped, and countless war crimes and massacres committed. Thousands of homes, mosques, churches, schools and whole villages were levelled to the ground. It is of the utmost importance to mention that at the time, during the genocide, today's President Vučić was Milošević's propaganda minister. Like in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this was no war. It was an extinction campaign, like the one Putin is now attempting in Ukraine. We will never forget the victims, nor should the rest of the world. Now, the world has just learned about Russian war crimes in Bucha and other places in Ukraine.

Let me recall the horrific Serb war crimes against a small Catholic village in Kosovo, the Meja massacre. On 27 April 1999, Serb forces killed at least 377 civilians, 36 of whom were under 18 years old. They were taken out of a refugee convoy and executed by the road. Serb forces transported the bodies to a site near Belgrade to cover up these crimes. This is only one of the many unspeakable atrocities committed by Serbia.

And now we are in this Chamber, 23 years later, listening to the same Serbian officials spewing hatred and perpetuating the same warmongering and inhuman rhetoric. Neither Mr. Vučić, who was part of the Cabinet

of the Butcher of the Balkans, nor Mr. Selaković, nor any other of these nationalists, has ever apologized — ever. Instead, they keep covering up and defending the war crimes. They praise the war criminals as heroes because the foundation of those crimes, namely, simple veiled hatred against our nation, racism and Serb supremacy, is still strong and alive. Serbia is the biggest threat to normalization and peace in the region.

Instead of coming to terms with the past, they continue to destabilize the region, not only Kosovo. Just last September the Serb president threatened our country with war. This was due to a dispute about licence plates for cars. Mr. Vučić amassed troops and sent warplanes to our border — over licence plates for cars. Council members can therefore see that it is not Serbia's past that is dangerous for us; it is the behaviour of contemporary Serbia that should change.

The Russian ambassador to Serbia supported that war mongering and, in September, even visited the Serbian troops at the border at that time. Following the same logic, the Russian ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina also just threatened his host country with war.

Recently, our ethnically diverse police teams have become the target of terrorist attacks, with an increase in shootings at police officers and their cars. We are lucky that no one has been hurt so far. Attacks are coming from Serbian territory and would be impossible if Mr. Vučić did not tolerate them. He and his allies are risking conflict in the Balkans, from Kosovo to Bosnia and Herzegovina to Montenegro. Serbia and Russia remain the biggest threat to peace in the region. If we do not close the Pandora's box that has been opened by Putin, Vučić and Dodik, the Balkans might become a dark place again.

When Vučić came into office, Serbia held just two military exercises with Putin's Russia a year. Last year, however, they held more than a hundred. Serbia has received special donations — war planes — from Russia and Belarus. Serbia under Vučić has engaged in an unprecedented military build-up. The country is an army ready to attack, not to defend, which is a major concern for all the neighbours in the region.

It is not only the equipment, but also the ideology as well as the media campaigns, that the world has to take seriously, as we and others in the region have warned for quite some time. Kosovo and other countries in the region need to protect themselves from

the aggressive and dangerous threat of an autocratic Serbia. Fortunately, we have friends and allies that are standing by our side. Just as in the cold war, deterrence is working. Unfortunately, it is necessary that we rely on it in dealing with both Russia and Serbia in the Western Balkans.

At the same time, the Republic of Kosovo is eager, willing and ready for dialogue. We want to move forward. For that to happen, however, Serbia needs to accept reality first. Without the fundamental recognition of reality, there can be no discussion, as we do not even have reality in common. The Republic of Kosovo is a peace-loving nation, the legality of whose independence has been confirmed by the International Court of Justice and recognized by the majority of the world, indeed the overwhelming majority of fellow peace-loving and democratic nations of the world. There is nothing to lose or fear by recognizing Kosovo. There is, however, plenty to gain: a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Europe, as well as a trusted and reliable ally.

But Serbia has to make a decision now. It has to decide if it wants to be a part of the West or remain Russia's proxy. After Ukraine, one thing is for sure: sitting in two chairs at the same time, aligning with both parties, is no longer an option; that time is over. Russian aggression has ended that era.

There is nothing provisional about the Republic of Kosovo and its independence. The Republic of Kosovo as a sovereign country is here to stay. Recognizing that reality is a fundamental step towards a European future.

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

Mr. Sharma (India): I would like to thank the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, for her first briefing to the Security Council on the activities of the UNMIK. We welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Nikola Selaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, at today's meeting.

Let me begin by reiterating India's principled position of supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia. We believe that all outstanding issues need to be resolved through peaceful negotiations. In this regard, we take note of the meetings held between Serbia and authorities in Pristina since 2014 under the auspices of the European Union (EU).

It is important that meetings are held without any preconditions and in good faith. The implementation of signed agreements, including on the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, will remain fundamental. Further, both sides need to find common ground to overcome mutual concerns, including political and ethnic issues. We welcome the ongoing efforts, including that of Quint members and the EU, towards resumption of dialogue.

The issue of missing persons, given its humanitarian character, needs to be resolved as a priority. We hope that, with the support of UNMIK, the authorities will be able to determine the fate of persons who remain missing. The voluntary and safe return of internally displaced persons from other countries in the region is also essential as a confidence-building measure. Together with other international partners, UNMIK should continue to encourage the Pristina authorities to address the problems of all communities.

We have taken note of the activities of the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) during the reporting period. Further, as part of an international cooperation effort, we are happy to note that the Kosovo Force troops have continued to effectively fulfil their mandate under resolution 1244 (1999). Both missions need to adhere to their respective mandates and maintain neutrality. Their close tactical cooperation with EULEX and the police authorities in Pristina has ensured that the overall security situation remains safe and secure.

In conclusion, I would like to note with appreciation that UNMIK has been playing an important role in promoting security, stability and respect for human rights. We call on all sides to fully cooperate with UNMIK and facilitate its work.

Mr. Gallagher (Ireland): I want to begin by welcoming Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh to the Security Council for the first time. She has our full support in her work going forward. I would also like to recognize Ministers Gërvalla-Schwarz and Selaković and welcome them to the Council.

Building peace takes political will. It takes compromise, and it takes open channels of communication. In Ireland, we value and believe in dialogue because we have seen that dialogue delivers. It brings peace, it delivers progress and it delivers for people.

That is why we support the Secretary-General's call for constructive and sincere engagement in the European Union (EU)-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. That United Nations-mandated dialogue is the channel through which issues and tensions between Kosovo and Serbia can and should be resolved.

Both sides have a responsibility to refrain from further divisive rhetoric or actions and to respect and implement the commitments that they have made under the dialogue without delay. There have been concrete gains that have improved the daily lives of all communities in Kosovo, and those must not be frittered away by actions that risk aggravating tensions.

A comprehensive, final and legally binding normalization agreement is essential for the European perspective of both Kosovo and Serbia, and for wider stability in the Western Balkans region.

We very much welcome the steps taken by Kosovo to address sexual and gender-based violence, in particular the adoption of a strategy against domestic violence and violence against women. We also value and support the role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in the promotion of gender equality, including through progressing the women and peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas, and providing support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

The women of Kosovo have made remarkable gains in political representation at the national level, and we hope to see that replicated at the local level in the coming years. For that to happen, any remaining barriers preventing women's full and equal participation in political life must be removed. The support or access to the resources they need to run for office at the local level also need to be addressed. The meaningful inclusion of Kosovo's youth in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts is also essential to achieving sustainable and lasting peace, and we took note of the comments made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the focus that she will putting on those agendas in her remarks.

We know that the people of Kosovo want prosperity and stability. We also know that they see EU accession as contributing to that end and note the progress made by the Government of Kosovo in advancing the EU reform agenda. At the same time, more needs to be done, particularly in relation to rule of law.

In that context, I also wish to underline Ireland's support for the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. Countering impunity for past crimes is essential to preventing future violations. It is vital that the authorities in Kosovo adhere to their commitments to the Specialist Chambers.

The United Nations continues to play an important role through its trust-building projects bringing together members of different communities, in particular young people, as well as supporting the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in Kosovo. We value in particular UNMIK's work on missing persons and the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the return of displaced persons.

Progress on both those issues can provide much-needed comfort and solace to the families of the missing and those who have been displaced for too long. They are essential steps in the process of reconciliation in Kosovo and are important for building confidence between Kosovo and Serbia.

We see all too often in the Council the misery caused by conflict. We know that it takes courage to overcome conflict and to overcome the divisions caused by conflict, but those are the steps that need to be taken and that are worth taking to benefit the peoples of Kosovo and Serbia.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I will begin by welcoming the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, and to thank her for her first briefing to the Council as the Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We also welcome Minister Selaković and Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Mexico has followed with concern the recent events in the Kosovo region and reiterates the importance for all parties to abstain from actions, policies and rhetoric that could increase tensions. We deplore the recent attacks against police officers in the Kosovo region and echo the statement made by Special Representative Ziadeh calling for moderation and for those who are responsible to be brought to justice.

A constructive Belgrade-Pristina dialogue without preconditions is the only possible way to find a mutually acceptable solution that will contribute to peace in the region, social cohesion and respect for the rights of minorities. That is particularly important given the

current circumstances in Europe resulting from the war in Ukraine. We deplore the fact that in the past six months, progress in that respect has been minimal, and we believe that the Council must make an unambiguous call for redoubled efforts.

The inclusive and significant participation of women in all aspects of public life, including in the European Union-facilitated dialogue, is critical. We should bear in mind the priorities and expectations of women, youth, civil society and a broad array of interested actors in order to move forward. We hope that the delegations participating in the dialogue will genuinely include the voices of women and youth.

Moreover, we have witnessed with dismay the high levels of violence against women. The study carried out by UN-Women at the end of last year concluded that gender-based violence in the political sphere and obstacles to women's full participation in politics are intrinsically linked to exclusion, marginalization and other forms of discrimination. Such actions must be uprooted, and we therefore welcome the adoption of a protection strategy against domestic violence and violence against women. That strategy must be in line with the highest international standards, such as those reflected in the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Istanbul Convention, that is, the Istanbul Convention.

Although the conflict ended a number of decades ago, its impact is still being felt. I would like to highlight two aspects thereof.

The first is that there are still 1,620 people who have been missing since 1999. We recognize the important backstopping efforts of UNMIK in maintaining contact with the families and the members of the Belgrade-Pristina Working Group on persons who are unaccounted for in connection with events in Kosovo. However, we deplore the fact that the working group did not meet during this period, and we call on the parties to resume cooperation within the group, which has proved effective in the past.

Secondly, more than 15,000 persons are displaced within the Kosovo region, almost 70,000 in the Western Balkans and 200,000 persons from Kosovo, the majority in Serbia. We recall the importance of protecting the right of all persons to return to their places of origin. We also urge the authorities in the Kosovo region to work with civil-society organizations

and local communities to create an environment that is conducive to their voluntary, safe and dignified return as well as to promote the process of reintegration and reconciliation.

I will conclude by expressing my country's gratitude to UNMIK for the important work it does to promote intercommunal and intercultural dialogue and to promote and protect human rights in coordination with the Kosovo Force, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We hope that with political will, in the next review of the Council of this issue we will be able to speak about tangible progress.

Mr. Coraiola Yinde Kloss (Brazil): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, for her remarks regarding the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) from September 2021 to March of this year.

Brazil appreciates the efforts of UNMIK in assisting the people of Kosovo. We understand that, despite remaining challenges, the Mission has been accomplishing some of its main objectives, as set out in resolution 1244 (1999), especially in overseeing the development of local institutions, supporting peacebuilding activities and providing assistance to local authorities to perform basic administrative functions. Nevertheless, the recent report (S/2022/313) points out that more needs to be done regarding the strengthening of the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organized crime, respect for the rights of minorities and, crucially, the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities in Kosovo, as agreed in the Brussels Agreement.

We also acknowledge the initiatives led by the European Union and the United States to foster dialogue and understanding between Pristina and Belgrade. In that regard, the resumption of direct contact between the authorities from both parties last October is particularly welcomed.

We note that, despite the continuous support of the international community, a political settlement remains elusive. As the UNMIK report makes clear, there is much distrust and lack of cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina. Furthermore, within Kosovo, Serbs and other minorities feel discriminated against and persecuted. That is most unfortunate, since the

political stability of Kosovo is of paramount importance to the Western Balkans.

In that regard, we believe that the persistent discussion on the recognition of Kosovo as an independent State has been detrimental to the wider political process and has undermined the prospects for meaningful regional cooperation. Resolution 1244 (1999) is clear that the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy within Serbia, while the development of self-governing political institutions is aimed at ensuring conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all the inhabitants of Kosovo. As the reports of the Secretary-General inform us, substantial autonomy for Kosovo has generally been achieved, but the conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all communities in the region have not yet been accomplished. Hence, the main objective of UNMIK remains unfulfilled, and the debate about an independent Kosovo seems premature.

It is necessary to put in place a broad dialogue among the various communities in the region in order to bring about much-needed stability and prosperity. The principles for that comprehensive political dialogue must be the strict observance of human rights, including freedom of religion and the integrity of religious sites, and the strengthening of the rule of law.

Many observers have noted that the status quo in Kosovo is unsustainable and that the lack of agreement may not only worsen tensions and deepen the estrangement among all communities, but it also risks irreversible changes on the ground and further reduces the prospects of a settlement. Hence, Pristina and Belgrade must display a renewed sense of urgency in resuming the negotiating process.

Brazil does not underestimate the complexity of issues involved, in particular regarding the future status of Kosovo. Brazil has always supported, and will remain supportive of, the efforts to bring about a negotiated solution that allows the peoples of the Balkans to live in peace, with security and prosperity.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh for her briefing. I welcome the presence of the Foreign Minister of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Selaković. I also listen attentively to the statement by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz.

At a time when Europe faces enormous security challenges, maintaining stability in Kosovo is of even greater significance. The international community,

particularly the Security Council, should maintain its attention and engagement, work within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999) and support the parties concerned in seeking a mutually acceptable political solution through negotiations and consultation. In that process, Serbia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity should be fully respected. In the light of the current situation, I would like to make four points.

First, it is important to maintain the security and stability of Kosovo. Since September last year, Kosovo has taken a series of unilateral actions, leading to an escalation of tensions. Until the two sides reach a new consensus through dialogue and consultation, any unilateral actions will lead only to heightened tensions, which are not in the interest of any party or in the overall security interests of Europe. The temporary arrangement on vehicle registration plates is about to expire. China encourages the two sides to reach a flexible and pragmatic arrangement, under the coordination of the European Union (EU), and to actively consider extending the current temporary arrangement.

Secondly, it is important to protect the legitimate rights of Kosovo Serbs. The harmonious coexistence of all ethnic groups is the key to realizing long-term stability in Kosovo. Pristina should adopt active measures to enhance mutual trust, solidarity and cooperation among all ethnic groups, including safeguarding the legitimate rights of Kosovo Serbs. Since January this year, there have been disputes between the two sides over the participation of Serbs living in Kosovo in Serbian elections.

China believes that any unilateral steps in violation of established practice will only exacerbate existing differences and will not contribute to the political settlement of the Kosovo issue. We hope that similar incidents will not reoccur. In that regard, the international community, in particular the EU, should play an important role.

Thirdly, it is important to continue to promote dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. Since July last year, the high-level talks have once again been at an impasse. We look forward to the relaunching of the dialogue process under the auspices of the EU. The negotiation outcomes already reached by the two sides should be fully respected and implemented. We urge Kosovo to take concrete measures to implement as soon as possible the provisions of the Brussels Agreement for the establishment of the Association/Community of

Serb-majority Municipalities in order to resolve a key obstacle in the bilateral relationship.

Fourthly, it is important to support the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in fulfilling its mandate. UNMIK was established pursuant to resolution 1244 (1999), and it shoulders important responsibilities regarding the Kosovo issue. Given the current standstill in bilateral talks and the ongoing tensions on the ground, maintaining UNMIK's presence is crucial. China appreciates the efforts of UNMIK, under the leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ziadeh, and supports UNMIK in carrying out its work in accordance with its mandate and playing an important role in maintaining peace and stability in Kosovo, responding to the coronavirus disease pandemic, promoting national reconciliation and assisting the return of displaced persons.

The United Nations and the Security Council should continue to support UNMIK and provide the political backing, personnel and financial resources required for the full implementation of its mandate. Kosovo should also provide security guarantees and facilitation for UNMIK's mandated operations.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to congratulate Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadeh on her first briefing on the situation in the province, and I thank her for the views that she provided. We welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Minister of Serbia, Mr. Nikola Selaković. We listened to the views of Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz.

At the outset, we would like to emphasize that the position of the Russian Federation on Kosovo remains unchanged. Resolution 1244 (1999) remains the international legal basis for the settlement of this issue. We support Belgrade and Pristina in reaching a viable, mutually acceptable solution, on the basis of that Security Council resolution, which should be in line with international law and be endorsed by the Security Council.

Before turning to an assessment of the current situation in the province, I should like to remind colleagues that this March marked the twenty-third anniversary of the NATO coalition bombing of Belgrade. As a result of that operation, which lasted 78 days, thousands of civilians were killed and more than 1,500 residential areas, 60 bridges, 30 per cent of all

schools, hospitals and approximately 100 monuments were destroyed. The coalition used tens of thousands of bombs and cruise missiles, many of them equipped with depleted uranium. In total, 15 tons of that radioactive substance were released, thereby contaminating a large area. The dire consequences of that crime for human health and the environment can still be seen today.

We also cannot overlook NATO's choice of an ally on the ground — the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) — whose many crimes remain unpunished to this day. On 7 January 2011, a report by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was published on the crimes committed by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army between 1998 and 2000, including crimes against humanity, war crimes, systematic abductions and killings, as well as widespread organ trafficking.

It is now 2022, and we are still closely following the work of the Specialist Court on the investigation of KLA crimes. We continue to hope for an objective trial and fair verdicts. So far that has been in vain. For our part, we view as unacceptable attempts by Pristina to challenge the legitimacy of the judicial process and to convince the international community of the manifest infallibility of the KLA's representatives.

I also recall that, on 24 March 1999 (see S/PV.3988), the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Mr. Lavrov, cautioned about the long-term adverse consequences of such an act by NATO, not only for the prospects for resolving the Kosovo situation and ensuring security in the Balkans but also for the stability of the entire contemporary system of international relations. It is clear that that was when the West tried on the role of the world's policeman and opened a Pandora's box.

An important step towards ending the bloodshed and starting work towards reconciliation between Belgrade and Pristina should have been the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1244 (1999). However, the Western permanent members of the Security Council were the first to lose sight of the resolution, as they rushed to recognize Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008. There was no referendum or resolution of the Security Council or the General Assembly to that effect. As a result, a Kosovo quasi-State, a Western pet project, was created.

After another two years, the negotiations were placed under Brussels' auspices. However, unfortunately, the Brussels Agreement, reached by the parties in 2013,

did not lead to tangible political results. Under myriad pretexts Kosovo Albanians have been sabotaging the creation of an association of Serb municipalities for nine years, thereby derailing the process of inter-ethnic reconciliation in the province. After all, the association was intended to provide basic guarantees for the survival of Kosovo Serbs in the areas of security, judicial and political affairs and socioeconomic and cultural affairs. We regret that neither the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/313) nor statements of most our colleagues pay any considerable attention to that issue.

Without the association, Kosovo Serbs remain in a very disadvantaged position. Here is a vivid example – attacks on Kosovo Serbs and their property doubled in 2021 as compared to 2020. There has also been a sharp increase in attacks this year, with 35 incidents taking place between January and March alone.

Let us recall that, since 1999, there have been virtually no Serbs in southern Kosovo. However, systematic efforts to definitively drive them out of the province continue, and there is an obvious attempt to erase their cultural and religious identity. Orthodox churches and monasteries, including those on the UNESCO World Heritage List, are under constant threat. One of them, the Vsoki Dečani monastery, has not been able to regain its lands since 2016, despite the decision of the so-called Constitutional Court of Kosovo in its favour.

In addition to Serbs, other non-Albanians are being subjected to discrimination. In fact, all national minorities are being forced out of the province. The number of non-Albanians returning to Kosovo are negligible. I ask my colleagues in the Security Council to reflect on whether they want to be complicit in creating an ethnically cleansed Kosovo for Albanians only. For Russia, such a prospect is categorically unacceptable.

Also absolutely unacceptable is the way in which the so-called provincial Government has treated the electoral rights of Kosovo Serbs. Contrary to previous practice, they were forbidden from voting — first in the Serbian referendum on 16 January and, subsequently, during the general presidential and parliamentary elections of 3 April. Ultimately, tens of thousands of people were excluded from the democratic process. We strongly condemn attempts to obscure the long-term negative effect of what happened. We demand that in the future such legal violence be countered — in deed and not in word — by the international presence, in line with its broad authority, first and foremost by the

missions of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Other dangerous unilateral actions by Kosovars include their efforts to destabilize the Serb-populated north of the province. In September and October 2021, the situation almost spiralled out of control when Pristina's special forces occupied a checkpoint Administrative Boundary Line and a number of other areas. It should be recalled that the Kosovo police used firearms. Dozens of civilians were injured. Such reckless conduct continues to this day, including in the isolated — and therefore more vulnerable — Serb enclaves in the south. Each new pretext is more absurd than the previous. They range from unsuccessful searches for contraband to attempts to seize coronavirus disease vaccines.

Pristina's actions towards UNMIK are unacceptable. Kosovo Albanians involved in the beating and detention of UNMIK officer Mikhail Krasnoshchekov on 28 May 2019 have still not been brought to justice. Another Mission representative, Mr. Antonov, was declared *persona non grata* by regional authorities on 31 December 2021, in flagrant violation of established international legal norms. Clearly, the United Nations must do more to ensure the inviolability of its representatives in Kosovo. The work of the Mission in the province is more important than ever. It must be able to fully carry out its mandate and have the necessary resources to do so.

We are seriously concerned by the ongoing attempts since late February by Mr. Kurti and his network to undermine the situation in the region by escalating anti-Serb rhetoric and calling on the West to protect Kosovo from the threats it allegedly faces. Pristina has begun to demand expedited integration into NATO and other Western alliances and to seek the deployment of a new permanent United States military base in the province. Such plans, including the intention to create a full-fledged army in Kosovo, are fundamentally in violation of resolution 1244 (1999) and are fraught with the risk of further escalating tensions. We have repeatedly heard about the British deliveries to Pristina of anti-tank missile launchers and guided missiles, and the deployment of instructors to train the security forces.

As for Kosovars themselves, they would be well-advised to fundamentally reconsider their priorities and not to allocate resources for the purchase of weapons, including through a special fund established to raise

funds for strengthening the defence of the province, but for addressing the difficult socioeconomic situation.

Those are the realities of the modern so-called State of Kosovo. Despite the methods adopted by the United States and a number of European countries when it was created in 1999, which I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, currently neither Brussels nor even Washington are in a position to exert significant influence over Pristina. Even the harsh criticism of Kosovo for its failure to comply with basic democratic and human rights standards, which Western countries have resorted to of late, has failed to yield results.

Clearly, these kinds of observations are insufficient. In fact, no tangible steps are being undertaken. That brings dialogue to a dead end and leads Brussels on a path to discreditation of mediation efforts, which is especially unfortunate given that the protracted crisis in the province is escalating. There are clear threats from this area to all of Europe — economic, migration and even terrorist threats. It is important to understand that this is a reckless approach.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for her briefing and wish her success in her new position. I welcome Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of the Republic of Kosovo, and Mr. Nikola Selaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, to this meeting.

Let me start by commending the Republic of Kosovo and its authorities for their achievements, despite the largely unfavourable environment due to the coronavirus disease pandemic. Local elections held in October brought forth yet further confirmation of how much Kosovo has advanced in building a State for the citizens by the citizens. Kosovo is a full-fledged democracy and an important actor for stability in the region. Its democratic internal development and its foreign and security policy have contributed to stabilizing the Western Balkans.

As we heard today, Kosovo's advancement on the women and peace and security agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda, in addition to an increase in the number of elected women, including to the highest positions, is remarkable.

We applaud Kosovo's clear positioning on Ukraine and its alignment with sanctions, and commend

the Government and the people of Kosovo for their generosity in receiving Afghan refugees and, lately, also Ukrainian displaced persons, including journalists.

Since 1999, for 23 years, UNMIK has supported Kosovo and its citizens in rebuilding their future. We thank all those who have offered their contribution to help Kosovo and its citizens move ahead.

Following the declaration of independence in 2008 and its international legitimacy through the opinion of the International Court of Justice in 2011, UNMIK's competencies and responsibilities have been gradually transferred to the Kosovo authorities. It was the right thing to do. Also, in response to the considerably improved reality, Council meetings on this issue have become more infrequent. Indeed, when there is not much to say, there is no need to meet.

We have therefore come to a moment that calls for a reality check. With the overall progress and consolidation of Kosovo institutions, with the strengthening of its international profile and the prospects of agreement through ongoing dialogue, there was no doubt that the role of UNMIK would further diminish and erode. There is nothing wrong with that. It is in the nature of things. United Nations missions are not meant to continue in perpetuity. They are there to perform their task and exit as soon as possible. UNMIK is not part of the walls of Kosovo. It was mandated to do a job and, in our view, that job, in its core mandate, is done. We ask ourselves how UNMIK, in its current configuration, is relevant and further needed in Kosovo.

We have very carefully read the Secretary-General's report on UNMIK (S/2022/313). The Mission has no crucial role in any of the key issues with which Kosovo needs assistance. Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is facilitated by the European Union (EU). Public order and security are the focus of the Kosovo Police, the Kosovo Security Force, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force. The rights of national minorities are enshrined in the country's Constitution and carried out through its institutions. The Kosovo justice system is consolidated and improving

There is a key element to keep in mind — the Kosovo situation is no longer a matter of peace and security. Kosovo is no longer an issue under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Speaking of peacekeeping now in Kosovo is meaningless. We therefore wonder about UNMIK's *raison d'être*.

Its budget of roughly \$42 million per year and its staff of 374 people call for an overall review of the role and effectiveness of UNMIK so as to avoid duplication with other agencies operating there or simply spinning in the void, with a view to the Council terminating UNMIK's mandate and helping move to a more effective United Nations presence fully fit-for-purpose, in accordance with the needs of the country.

In that connection, we commend the work of the United Nations country team in response to Kosovo's needs and priorities. But while UNMIK is in Kosovo, we will expect it to do its best and — in full impartiality — help Kosovo and its citizens. We listened very carefully to the commitment of the Special Representative in that respect.

Despite legal aspects involved on how the communication was handled, we expect UNMIK to fully and properly investigate the allegations against its personnel who were declared *persona non grata* by the authorities. Who the persons are and what they did is of public knowledge. We expect UNMIK to properly vet their hires and have them behave in strict conformity with their mandate in full impartiality — not for any obscure agenda — and in respect of the national security of Kosovo and the rules of the host country.

We fully support the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and call on all those involved to accelerate it. There is no alternative to dialogue, but what is needed is an active and productive process — not a frozen one. A never-ending dialogue without results simply erodes public trust.

The image of the Balkans as a place of turmoil and political instability is bygone. Wounds of the past have not completely disappeared, of course. How could they, given what Kosovo and the region have been through? We must not forget the missing persons. There should never be impunity for sexual violence in conflict. We hear the silent scream of some 20,000 Kosovo women and girls who were used as a weapon of war by Serbs who are still at large. Yet attention should be devoted to improving the present and the future. While the Balkans are nowhere near perfection, they live nowadays in a completely different reality. I challenge anyone — in the Council or outside of it — to argue and prove that the Balkans are not nowadays much better off with Kosovo as an independent country.

The independence of Kosovo is a reality, an issue settled 14 years ago. It is not for discussion in the

Council or outside of it. It has been a question for the Kosovars to decide — and they have. Since 2008, the entire region advances in peace and development, with a concrete reality and an ever-increasing prospect of close regional cooperation, moving individually and collectively towards the European Union. Maybe it is not known in the Council, but the Western Balkans have created common institutions in which Serb and Kosovar nationals serve together, such as the Western Balkans Fund and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, both headquartered in Tirana.

Our leaders meet all the time, everywhere, in Albania and Serbia, in North Macedonia and Kosovo, and they do not talk about conflicts, tensions or war. They talk about reconciliation and cooperation; we talk about the free movement of people and capital. We talk Europe. This is, in our view, is the best investment for the future. In our part of the world, we do not need more weapons, we need brains. We do not need killing drones; we need ideas, innovation and investments.

Finally, let me address one key issue for the region, for both Kosovo and Serbia — reconciliation. The war of aggression in Ukraine brought to our mind the dreadful memories of the war during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Massacres of the civilian population — be they in Bucha, Ukraine, or in Račak, Kosovo, or in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina — all have one thing in common: they are despicable, unacceptable, intolerable crimes. And accountability always ends by knocking on the door. Milošević died behind bars; Karadžić was convicted of genocide and is paying for his deeds. A word to the wise: the instrumentalization of national minorities — in Kosovo or anywhere else — is playing with fire, with terrible consequences, as we have seen so many times. Our region has seen the worst of it in the past.

We have argued several times that Russian aggression directly and indirectly affects the entire world, including the Western Balkans, and we should not lose sight of or focus on the need to properly mitigate those threats. Russian proxies in the region should not be allowed any space to undermine or roll back achievements.

In this respect, we condemn in the strongest possible terms the recent attacks against the police in Kosovo, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General also rightly did. Such criminal attacks only create artificial tensions that favour illegal activity. They should be condemned by all, including Serbia,

and perpetrators must be held accountable. No part of the territory of Kosovo should be left in the hands of lawlessness, and we strongly encourage Kosovo authorities to do whatever is needed to make law prevail.

The rule of law for democracies should never be open to question. Extensive legislation and good practices with regard to national minorities exist in Europe and the Balkans, and Kosovo has one of the best and strongest legislative frameworks as well as an exemplary implementation record. It is not just us who are saying that. Even though the minority population of Kosovo counts for less than 5 per cent, Kosovo has established itself as a multi-ethnic State. We disagree with the dark picture painted by the Serbian Foreign Minister in this respect, since it is simply not the case. Creation of artificial entities that can only lead to dysfunctional States is not an option and should not be supported, and Albania will never condone it. The only viable solutions are those that guarantee rights by law and exercise them through institutions, and this must be the case in Kosovo as well.

I would like to encourage Serbia and Kosovo to engage seriously in the EU-facilitated dialogue and, by closing the dark chapters of the past, design their future through mutual recognition, good-neighbourliness, increased economic and trade relations, exchanges in science, education and culture, and people-to-people contacts, in particular among youth. There is nothing to invent since everything has been done before. The only need is for more political courage, wisdom and vision.

I would add a further word, which I had not planned to say. I listened to our Russian colleague and regret to be obligated to react, but since I have the floor, I would like to say that, coming from the region, what we heard today is not true. In the last few weeks, we have become accustomed to Russia's false narratives in relation to Ukraine. Now Russia is extending them to Kosovo. We regret that Russia cannot see the changed reality in the Western Balkans. Russia's vision is blurred, so rather than seeing the region as it is, Russia sees it as it wishes it were. We are sorry for that.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadeh for her briefing on the latest developments on the ground and for her intense activity since taking office. I welcome the participation at this meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, His Excellency Nikola Selaković, and I thank Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz for her statement.

More than two decades after the establishment of the international presence pursuant to resolution 1244 (1999), the situation in Kosovo remains worrying on several counts. The normalization process between Kosovo and Serbia has fallen short of expectations. It is regrettable that diplomatic moves and various initiatives aimed at resuming a dialogue in good faith, on the basis of existing agreements, have not brought results.

Despite a few meetings at the technical level, the dialogue is struggling to rise to a high level, with only one high-level meeting having taken place during the reporting period. Normalization is central to Kosovo's regional and international integration process and is the driving force that will enable it to enter a virtuous cycle in terms of development.

The issue of free movement remains a major challenge. It is nevertheless crucial for Kosovo's cohesion that all citizens enjoy their full right to circulate without fear for their safety. To this end, a sustainable solution must be found for license plates in the Serb-majority northern region.

The implementation of the Brussels Agreement is an important pillar in the normalization process and a vital element for the autonomy of the Serb communities. Delaying its implementation can only take Kosovo further away from the stability it needs. I would nevertheless like to commend the actions of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) aimed at promoting living together and increasing inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion.

We also welcome President Vučić's stated willingness to continue negotiations with Pristina on the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities, as provided for in the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations of April 2013. A stronger commitment is indeed needed to give new momentum in this direction. The people of Kosovo need this normalization for their well-being and for their economic development.

It is in that context that we deplore the decision of the Kosovo Parliament to no longer allow the participation of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo Serbian electoral processes. We urge the authorities of Kosovo and Serbia to find a mutually satisfactory agreement in this area. Currently, the Quint has a role to play in this regard.

The security situation in Kosovo is still very fragile. Violence is particularly affecting minority communities, especially the Serbian community.

These violations also affect places of worship and religious cemeteries and undermine living together and interaction between communities. Discrimination against minority communities must be addressed more vigorously, and the law on protection against discrimination must be implemented.

Progress on the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons was also very slow, with only 118 returns registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the reporting period. A durable solution to the situation of these people is urgently needed so that they can return to their homes in favourable conditions.

The issue of missing persons is of crucial interest for the construction of Kosovo. The fact that the Belgrade-Pristina Working Group on Missing Persons held no meetings during the reporting period further postpones the administration of the cases of 1,620 persons still missing as a result of the events of 1998 and 1999. We encourage UNMIK to continue its efforts in this regard.

We also commend the work of the Kosovo Government commission responsible for the verification and recognition of the status of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, which was able to grant survivor status to 1,149 applicants of the 1,656 applications received. Granting survivor status to victims of sexual crimes is an important step in their recovery. It is also a significant contribution to peacebuilding. We encourage UNMIK's support for the commission granting survivor status to 12 victims before the end of the commission's mandate in 2023. More generally, we encourage the increased participation of women in the process, as well as all actions and policies aimed at better taking women into account in public life.

In conclusion, my country reaffirms its support for UNMIK, and we reiterate our encouragement in its mission to rebuild peace and cohesion in Kosovo.

Ms. Syed (Norway): Let me take this opportunity to warmly welcome Ms. Caroline Ziadeh back to the Security Council in her new and challenging position as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kosovo and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Norway looks forward to working closely with her and her team. Let me also thank her also for her first briefing to the Security Council and for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/313).

One key political and security development within the reporting period was centred around Kosovo's local elections. We are pleased that the overall conduct of these elections was assessed as positive by the European Union (EU), while it did also note some lack of transparency and accountability. Yet, when it came to the Serbian presidential and parliamentary elections in April, the Kosovo Government did not take the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the principle of protecting the political and civil rights of all its citizens. We acknowledge that it is part of the prerogative of Kosovo to decide whether or not to permit voting in another country's elections on its territory. However, we note that Kosovo decided not to allow participation in the Serbian elections, which had been the case previously.

Last September we saw renewed tensions between Belgrade and Pristina, triggered by long-standing, unresolved aspects of the freedom of movement. A permanent solution to the licence-plate issue is urgent and would be a step in the right direction. We encourage the parties to strengthen dialogue and to engage constructively based on the Brussels Agreement while also exercising pragmatism in finding mutually acceptable compromises and respecting the commitments already undertaken.

Above all, a comprehensive agreement between Kosovo and Serbia on the full normalization of relations is key to averting a frozen conflict and to achieving improved economic development for all.

Like other speakers, we are deeply concerned about last week's attacks on the Kosovo police in the north of Kosovo. We note that the relevant law-enforcement agencies are investigating the incidents and stress that any use of force against the Kosovo police is unacceptable. We also echo the Secretary-General in welcoming the adoption of Kosovo's strategy for protection against domestic violence and violence against women, and we emphasize the importance of having the standards of the Istanbul Convention reflected in its implementation. Inclusive approaches are key to peace. Gender mainstreaming as well as the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in any dialogue or decisions about post-conflict peacebuilding and the future of Kosovo remain crucial.

The question of a review of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has been raised several times. While noting that the Mission pursues

important work in various areas, we would support a closer look at possible efficiency improvements.

We note the slow overall progress in the European Union-facilitated dialogue and urge all actors to engage fully. Both Kosovo and Serbia should intensify their efforts to improve relations and refrain from actions and rhetoric that may set back dialogue or further increase tensions leading to incidents. There is no alternative to the EU-led process; it needs our full support. Norway will continue to work closely with EU institutions, key EU member States and the United States to that end.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I welcome Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and thank her for her first briefing to the Security Council and her tireless efforts alongside the Mission's team. I also welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, His Excellency Nikola Selaković, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Her Excellency Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, in today's meeting.

The United Arab Emirates believes in the importance of intensifying efforts to reduce tensions, encourage dialogue and prevent any exacerbations of disagreements between ethnic groups in Kosovo on the one hand and between Kosovo and Serbia on the other, especially in the light of the escalated conflict and the current situation in Europe, which has cast a shadow over the entire region, including the Balkans.

It is imperative in that regard to recall that more than two decades have elapsed since the region was engulfed in a destructive war, during which important and tangible progress was made to achieve reconciliation. It is thus essential that those efforts do not regress as a result of the recent turmoil in Europe. From that standpoint, it is important to focus on the following points.

First, we encourage continuing the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia facilitated by the European Union to reach a convergence of positions between both parties. In that regard, we stress that current tensions should not undermine the efforts made towards peace and stability. Thus we encourage both parties to return to the negotiating table as dialogue is the only way to resolve the outstanding issues between them.

Secondly, we commend the ongoing efforts to disseminate the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence across all segments of society in Kosovo. In that context, we stress the importance of countering hate speech and preventing the dissemination thereof, especially through social media, in order to build peaceful, secure and prosperous societies in the region.

In that regard, we must look towards forging the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence by intensifying communication between ethnic and religious groups in Kosovo, including through the efforts made by the United Nations Mission and regional organizations as well as civil-society institutions.

Thirdly, the United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of supporting women's full and meaningful participation in any mediation efforts to resolve differences between Kosovo communities as well as any dialogue between both parties. In that regard, we commend the multilateral group on security and gender in Kosovo for supporting the role of women and its efforts to consolidate the gains made by women in Kosovo. We also stress the importance of women's effective participation in the political process and commend the progress made in Kosovo in that regard.

Women's participation is essential to ensuring that any agreements between both parties reflect the concerns of both communities in a more comprehensive manner, as that would help lay strong foundations for sustainable peace.

Fourthly, the support for the important role played by the United Nations in Kosovo should continue, as it undertakes many activities and projects that support Government institutions. The United Nations also undertakes valuable initiatives aimed at building trust between religious and ethnic communities, including through the virtual Kosovo trust-building platform as well as providing economic empowerment and support for the search for missing persons.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that the difficult geopolitical situation in Europe necessitates a redoubling of efforts to resolve the differences between Kosovo and Serbia and ensure that all issues are addressed in a peaceful and sustainable manner in order to achieve security and stability for both countries and the region as a whole. Doing so will help lay a strong foundation to prevent any escalation of disputes in the Balkans.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Caroline Ziadeh for her briefing today, and we look forward to working with her. I also would like to thank Foreign Minister Nikola Selaković and Foreign Minister Gërvalla-Schwarz for participating in this meeting.

As has been noted, this is the first briefing on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) since Russia's brutal and unprovoked war against Ukraine. With Europe and the world responding to the consequences of President Putin's war of choice, the preservation of stability in the Western Balkans remains of utmost importance.

In that regard, I just need to respond to the comments of the Russian delegation earlier in this meeting. The Russian intervention opened with the usual misinformation and disinformation we have come, I think, regrettably, to expect from the Russian delegation these days — for example, the use of the scare term “radioactive depleted uranium”.

I will not take the Council's time rebutting the falsehoods that we have heard, but I think that my colleagues have all seen pictures live in the last few days from Bucha and Mariupol, pictures that, of course, no Russian citizen will freely be able to see. I think that, as long as pictures like that continue to directly flow from Ukraine daily, no delegation involved in causing those pictures has the standing or credibility to lecture anyone in the Chamber on respecting human rights or to accuse any other State of reckless behaviour.

Let me be clear — the United States remains committed, together with its European partners, to fostering peaceful, prosperous, multi-ethnic societies that uphold and respect human rights and the rule of law across the Western Balkans. The United States strongly urges both parties to engage energetically in all aspects of the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU) to find solutions for the outstanding issues, implement existing agreements and make concrete progress towards normalizing relations with the goal of mutual recognition. The EU-facilitated dialogue remains the best platform for achieving progress, not only to existing tensions, but also on issues that impact the daily lives of people in the region. We therefore welcome the EU Special Representative's plans to host chief negotiators from both parties this month to continue that important work.

We call on both Pristina and Belgrade to resume cooperation on missing persons. That working group has previously achieved tangible results in providing

answers to the families of the missing, and we join the Secretary-General in welcoming the commitment of both parties to advancing such efforts, including through the European Union-facilitated dialogue process.

It remains as clear as ever that UNMIK has fulfilled its purpose, as outlined in the Security Council's original mandate in 1999. We commend the work of the United Nations entities, agencies and funds that are active in the country to further the development of democratic norms and institutions in Kosovo and the region. However, a peacekeeping mission is clearly no longer necessary for that work to continue. It is time to reduce the frequency of these briefings to an annual basis. UNMIK played an important role in the early days of Kosovo's stabilization and development, but it has outlived its purpose. The Council needs to devote its limited time and resources to addressing other issues.

We therefore again call on the Security Council to end UNMIK's mandate and enable the United Nations presence in Kosovo to transition into a more effective role for the benefit of Kosovo and for the entire region.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I join other speakers in welcoming Special Representative of the Secretary-General Caroline Ziadeh, this being her first time in the Council in her new capacity, and thank her for her briefing. My delegation supports the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team in the execution of their mandates. We also welcome the participation of His Excellency Mr. Nikola Selaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Kenya welcomes the continued consultative efforts between Belgrade and Pristina. We call on the parties to uphold their commitments made within the framework of the European Union-facilitated dialogue, bearing in mind that negotiation is the only viable path to the normalization of relations.

We are deeply concerned by the recent reports of a string of armed attacks against police agents. Those attacks underscore the need to do more to entrench the rule of law as a prerequisite for genuine reconciliation and enduring peace. Kenya notes the continuing efforts by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and other United Nations agencies to support the Kosovo authorities in their coronavirus disease (COVID-19) response, including the expansion of vaccination sites and the provision of specialized training for health workers regarding the COVID-19

pandemic. We commend UNMIK in particular for supporting initiatives to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19 and support the post-pandemic recovery as part of trust-building efforts among communities, as well as between the people and institutions.

Kenya reiterates the need to counter the use of divisive rhetoric and hate speech, especially through social media. In that regard, we hope to hear more in due course about the pilot initiative launched by UNMIK last year to monitor incitement to hatred and hate speech on social and online media.

Kenya underscores the need for the increased participation of women, young people and civil society in decision-making processes and cross-community dialogue. We recognize the role of UNMIK in that regard and encourage both sides to ensure the meaningful participation of those groups so that their needs and expectations within the EU-facilitated dialogue and other processes are fully taken on board.

In conclusion, I reiterate the need for the parties to recommit to the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) and to constructively engage in the dialogue in order to make swift progress on the comprehensive normalization of their relations. We encourage them to maintain the peace and refrain from any acts that could spark an escalation.

Mr. Benaabou (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing and reiterate my congratulations on her appointment. I also welcome the participation of the Foreign Ministers of Kosovo and Serbia.

France reiterates its commitment to the European perspective of Kosovo and Serbia. That perspective can be envisaged only if Belgrade and Pristina settle their dispute peacefully. A comprehensive, permanent and binding agreement is needed to normalize their relations. The European Union is fully playing its part in the context of the dialogue facilitated by Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák. Kosovo and Serbia must now fully respect and fully implement the agreements previously reached and engage in good faith in the dialogue.

In that context, France calls for working constructively to resolve bilateral differences, to avoid fuelling tensions and to act in accordance with the values and principles that underpin European integration. In particular, we hope that the working group on the licence plates will be able to find a negotiated and

lasting compromise solution without delay. We fully support the mediation of European Union Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák.

We express our satisfaction with the increased judicial activity of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office since 2020. We reaffirm our support for efforts to combat corruption and impunity for serious crimes. We encourage greater transparency in the appointment processes of high-level judicial bodies.

France welcomes the adoption in January of the strategy for protection against domestic violence and violence against women and its associated action plan, as well as the plan to host a high-level summit on women and peace and security in Kosovo in 2022. The inclusion of women in dialogue and reconciliation processes and, more broadly, their political participation must be encouraged. That is necessary for a lasting and constructive settlement of the dispute between Belgrade and Pristina.

We fully support the work of Ms. Caroline Ziadeh, as Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), to promote security, stability, the strengthening of the rule of law and respect for human rights in Kosovo and the region at a time when the geopolitical context is becoming more difficult. UNMIK can count on the concerted action of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, to which France has just increased its support. Alongside Portugal and Italy, we have established a standby force for maintaining order within the European Gendarmerie Force.

France and the European Union remain committed to the stabilization of the Western Balkans and to the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Their common European future depends on it.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): At the outset, let me acknowledge the presence of His Excellency Mr. Nikola Selaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia. I thank Ms. Caroline Ziadeh for her briefing and join other delegations in congratulating her on assuming her duties as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). My delegation assures her of its cooperation and support during the period it shall be serving on the Council.

We also welcome the Secretary-General's comprehensive report on the implementation of the

mandates of UNMIK in promoting peace and security in Kosovo and in the region (S/2022/313), pursuant to the decision of the Security Council in its resolution 1244 (1999).

I have also taken note of the views shared with the Security Council by Ms. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz.

Achieving the normalization of the situation in the autonomous province of Kosovo is necessary for the long-term peace, security and prosperity of the Western Balkan region and the wider European region. To that end, we encourage the resumption of constructive negotiations between the representatives of Belgrade and Pristina within the framework of the European Union-facilitated dialogue, and urge the parties to work towards concrete progress on mutual understandings and previously reached agreements.

Ghana remains supportive of an open, transparent and inclusive process of dialogue, involving women, youth and all sectors of society, to ensure the sustainability and durability of the agreements reached. We believe that further close cooperation between the sides is necessary to address the common challenges of the coronavirus disease pandemic, the energy crises and the economy. That collaborative effort can, however, rest only on the foundations of multi-ethnic stability and a firm respect for civil and political rights in the autonomous province.

We also note the need to swiftly address the developing tensions arising from the conduct of the recently held elections and related issues of free movement, and further call for tolerance in dealing with incidents affecting religious and cultural sites. We encourage all sides to refrain from rhetoric that could be inflammatory and actions that are unilateral to avoid the risk of escalation in a region whose security environment is presently fragile.

We welcome the work of UNMIK in building trust and social cohesion among the various communities, ethnic groups and institutions. We also commend the Mission's support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those initiatives relating to gender protection and empowerment, and youth, peace and security. Such efforts remain key to promoting unity and forging peaceful relations among the people.

Finally, we encourage a unified approach on the part of the Council and the international community in finding a lasting and comprehensive solution in

Kosovo, in accordance with the fundamental principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and resolution 1244 (1999).

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

Let me begin by congratulating Special Representative Ziadeh on her appointment and by thanking her for her briefing. We welcome the opportunity new leadership provides for an improved relationship with the Kosovo Government and a fresh look at how the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) can adapt to serve the current conditions in Kosovo.

We encourage continued constructive engagement among the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNMIK and the Kosovo Government. UNMIK has played a vital role in the incredible progress Kosovo has made since resolution 1244 (1999) was adopted in 1999. But conditions on the ground are unrecognizable from 1999, and a review of UNMIK's role and responsibilities is needed.

Kosovo's democracy and institutions continue to show their maturity. In this context, we must condemn last weekend's violent attacks against the Kosovo police, who represent and protect all of Kosovo's citizens.

We congratulate the current Government of Kosovo on its first year in office. In particular, we welcome the renewed commitment to prioritizing the rule of law and fighting corruption, including through legal reforms and anti-corruption initiatives; the Government's continuing commitment to addressing the legacies of the 1998-1999 conflict, including through commissions for missing persons and victims of sexual violence; and Kosovo's ongoing international contribution, through its support to the evacuation from Kabul and the humanitarian response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

We note, however, perceptions in some quarters that the Kosovo Serb community's concerns and views sometimes go unheard. The recent decision on voting in Kosovo in Serbia's elections is an example. We encourage the Government to refocus its efforts to meet its constitutional duty to integrate minority communities and address their concerns.

We are concerned by the increase of dangerous rhetoric in Kosovo and the region leading to security incidents. The deployment of fighter jets to the Kosovo

border in September is an example of that. Reports of the United Kingdom supplying anti-tank missiles referred to by the representative of the Russian Federation are baseless, but to be clear, the United Kingdom supports Kosovo's right to develop its own armed forces.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the United Kingdom's renewed commitment to peace and security in the region, including through our Prime Minister's appointment of a Special Envoy to the Western Balkans, Sir Stuart Peach.

We fully support the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, facilitated by the European Union (EU), under EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák. Now is the moment for both parties to engage in the dialogue in good faith, honour their dialogue commitments, be open to compromise and creativity, and avoid actions or rhetoric that could reduce prospects for a comprehensive and sustainable normalization agreement that benefits the people of both countries.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I cannot but respond to the statement delivered by our colleague from the United States, who, in commenting on my statement on the Kosovo issue, drew a parallel to the situation in Ukraine. I call on him to go ahead and familiarize himself with the statement of the United States Representative at a Security Council meeting on Kosovo on 24 March 1999 (see S/PV.3988). His own double standards will then become quite obvious to him.

For 78 days, NATO bombed Belgrade. The United States killed nearly 1 million Iraqis. What did it do to Libya? Those countries are thousands of kilometres from the United States and pose no threat to it, and yet it actively fabricated various theories of limited sovereignty or humanitarian interventions.

The United States representative mentioned that I have nothing to teach him in the current circumstances, and yet he has been teaching the residents of Belgrade, Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Raqqa and Baghuz, as well as the Afghan provinces of Kandahar and Nangarhar and other parts of Afghanistan very well. Not all of the United States strikes were precise, to put it mildly. But that is different. That is collateral damage, as Madeleine

Albright put it, and apparently such collateral damage was justified in the view of the United States.

Indeed, the truth lies in the fact that the essence of United States policy and action is rooted in a single premise—the West is always right. International law can be distorted in any direction if it advances the interests of Washington and its military industrial complex. Violations of human rights are condemned only when it is beneficial or convenient to the United States, and international legal mechanisms are applicable only with respect to those who it labelled ahead of time as criminals.

For example, the United States did not wait for an investigation into the heinous provocation that transpired in Bucha, Ukraine. Perhaps it identified the perpetrators even before that provocation was staged.

I ask the United States to not engage in these double standards and approaches that are apparent — not just to me but to others as well, including the Serbs. Insofar as what lies behind the actions of the United States, there is only one clear goal — the willingness and desire of NATO to dictate and impose its will, through force, upon other members of the international community.

The President: There are still requests for further statements. Let me encourage participants to keep their statements concise in the interest of time.

The representative of Serbia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Selaković (Serbia): I have the obligation to react and respond to the words said by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz here today.

Instead of speaking about the real problems on the ground and the lack of respect for human rights, about the abolition of political freedoms, about more than 200,000 internally displaced persons, about the desecration of churches, monasteries and cemeteries, about totally ignored crimes by Kosovo Albanians, without any kind of judicial epilogue, Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz told us a story about her political wishes and goals, abusing this Security Council meeting in order to speak against the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and its role and against the President of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, who is, by the way, the President of her country too. She should pay due respect when speaking about the President of her country.

It is the truth that so-called Kosovo is a result of a separatist movement, of terrorist activities, of drug trafficking and human organ trafficking. Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz could teach the whole world lessons on how something similar must never ever recur. Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz was speaking about butchers of the Balkans, but she failed to mention that the real butchers of the Balkans are the former so-called President of so-called Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, and the former so-called Speaker of Pristina's Parliament, Kadri Veseli. At this very moment, both of them are in the Hague, in the detention unit of the special court formed by Pristina for the crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army, because of their unprecedented dimensions.

Serbia is an independent sovereign State, with clear policy goals, including the European Path and respect for its traditional friends. The accusations against Serbia, claiming that it is serving as a proxy, are disrespectful of this organ and the United Nations. Serbia is a pillar of peace and stability in the region. That has been stated by the leaders of almost all of the Member States sitting here today together with us.

As for regional stability and cooperation, the contrast between President Vučić and Albin Kurti has never been more stark and more obvious. While the President is building every day—bridges of cooperation in the region, such as the Open Balkan Initiative, the exchange of missing goods, giant infrastructure projects—Albin Kurti is destroying, mostly at night, by sending special armoured units, banning political rights and ruining the dialogue process. That is normal for him. Kurti has been one of the political commissioners of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), whose many victims are still awaiting justice.

In June 1998, KLA terrorists attacked villages Retimlje and Opteruša, near Orahovac. Terrorists kidnapped 15 males from the Kostić family and killed all of them. The only surviving member of the family is the then-young Olgica Božinović Kostić. She was beaten and then raped. And she was the only survivor from that family.

Now, going on 24 years after this horrible crime, nobody has ever been prosecuted or sentenced. The same is true of the crimes carried out by the person named by Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz as the son who helped them. On 14 May 1999, NATO aircraft bombed a road between Prizren and Suva Reka, with a long column of Albanian refugees—killing 87 persons, all civilians, 10 newborns and 26 children under 15 years of age.

The term genocide should not be abused, especially not for the political sensationalist purposes to which Pristina has continuously been prone. Such rhetoric, in general, arbitrary assessments and claims without any evidence are frivolous, unfounded in reality and serve the purpose of gaining cheap political points. Such irresponsible claims jeopardize any possibility of progress in the normalization between Belgrade and Pristina between Serbs and Albanians.

Finally, if one wants to talk about the ethnic composition of the population of Kosovo and Metohija, then and now we should clearly lay out the facts and say that over 90 per cent of persons living in Kosovo and Metohija today are Albanians and that Serbs suffered in recent decades from being victims of crimes and expelled from their centuries-old ancestral homes, forced to leave them due to intimidation, discrimination and threats.

In support of that, we remind the Council that more than 200,000 internally displaced persons residing in the Republic of Serbia without the possibility or conditions for returning to their ancestral homes. Pristina and its policy are responsible for that. Therefore, this idea and the attempt to reverse the well-known and often publicly proclaimed long-term aspiration and political goal of Albanian leaders from Kosovo and Metohija over the decades to create an environment with an ethnic composition that includes exclusively Albanians is cynical.

The same is true of sexual violence against women. Every crime is horrible, but the data in the report that we are discussing today was collected on the basis of the work of the Commission to Recognize and Verify Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Kosovo War in Kosovo and Metohija. Since the establishment of the Commission in February 2018, a total of 1,656 applications have been registered, of which 149 have been accepted. The number of victims does not diminish the horrific effect of this type of violence on each victim, individually. But it should also be noted that speculating on numbers does not contribute to the achievement of justice, but leads to politicization and slows down the reconciliation process.

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz said that they are a vivid democracy with huge potential in future and serve as a model of democracy. They are not even able to respect their so-called Constitution.

Let me just note what is mentioned in the Secretary-General's report with regard to the need to respect their so-called Constitutional Court's decision on the restitution of the property of the Visoki Dečani monastery. That is just one of dozens of similar decisions.

But it is not strange that she was speaking in that way. The reason is very simple: she was representing only herself, not an independent internationally recognized country that is a State Member of the United Nations.

And it is going to stay that way because their motive is in fact not to get independence. I would refer Council members to any interview given by Mr. Albin Kurti. The Council will then see that their final aim is to create a Greater Albania, not an independent so-called State of Kosovo.

The President: Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz has asked for the floor for a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz: I would now stress that the dialogue process is very important and re-emphasize that, in my earlier statement, I said that Kosovo was eager and willing for the dialogue process to make progress. I therefore invite Council members to consider whether it is possible to achieve progress in a process facilitated by Brussels in which the United States, United Kingdom, the European Union, States Members of the United Nations and others are playing an active role, which we very much welcome. Everybody in the Chamber today has witnessed how difficult the process has been and continues to be, and that has shown us what the dialogue process should not be in future.

The Balkans are facing the enormous impact of cyberwar and fake news. I often ask myself if the ones organizing the fake news are themselves the first victims. Do they really believe the fake news that they are spreading, or is it just a political decision to use fake news to manipulate international public opinion? I am really not sure which is the case but hearing so much fake information and so many lies, all in a row, makes it difficult to take it seriously and continue this Council meeting without dismantling each and every one of them.

I am not going to do that, because I am convinced Council members and others in the Chamber know very well what happened in the 1990s. That is one element of truth. There is no alternative truth to that, Mr. President.

It is one truth, and one that everybody knows. We do not need to create new "facts" to establish the truth about the Butcher of the Balkans, because it is very clear that that was Slobodan Milošević.

It is a pity that the Serbia of today is incapable of distancing itself from the crimes that Milošević committed in Kosovo, but not only Kosovo; he started in Slovenia, moved to Croatia and then to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the end, he came to Kosovo. And, yes, NATO came to stop the genocide. From that multilateral engagement, a democratic and prosperous country was born. I understand perfectly well why Russia is so aggressive against Kosovo: it hates the success story that Kosovo represents in the world, namely, the success of a multilateral intervention. That is the story of Kosovo, which is the story of the democratic world intervening to end a genocide.

Sitting in this Chamber today and listening to the representative of Russia talk about the liberation of Kosovo, I cannot help but think of the brave people of Ukraine who are defending their country. Today, the Russians are using the same words about us that they have used about them. As witnesses to what is happening in Ukraine, I am very proud today to represent a country from which brave soldiers — women and men, members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) — defended their own people, their own homes and their own country. I am very proud of that, just as I would not be proud to represent Russia or Serbia today. That is on them; it is not on me. I do not have the power to decide what they do. I can decide what I do and how I represent myself and my country.

The Serbian Foreign Minister is trying not only to falsify the facts, but to do something very similar to what Slobodan Milošević did in the 1980s, which is how the war in the Balkans started. War started with the creation of a perception that Serb minorities were in danger and that they need Serbia to intervene with false propaganda and fabricated news. We know very well, and everybody knows, thanks to Serbian journalists who have written about it, that the story of the Panda Bar massacre in Peja in which for years and years it was claimed that KLA soldiers had killed Serb Kosovars was planned in Serbia and not in Kosovo, that in fact Serbs were hired to kill other Serbs to create the image of Serbs being in danger. The most important thing is that they know the truth in Belgrade, which is where the fiction was planned and executed.

As to the issue of organ trafficking, let me talk about the Swiss Senator Dick Marty, who prepared a report about war crimes that he accused Kosovar representatives of having committed during the war and thereafter. The same Mr. Dick Marty recently told the media that the Swiss police had approached him long ago to offer him the highest degree of security in Switzerland because a Serbian intelligence agency had wanted to assassinate him and put the blame on Kosovo. These are the words of the Swiss police. It is not Kosovo police making that claim.

There is a long tradition — and a very dangerous one — of propaganda being used to create the false impression that people are in danger when they are in fact not and that they need the protection of third parties who do not in fact intend to protect them but are only trying to implement their own strategic political vision. We are seeing this pattern being repeated in Ukraine,

As the Serbian representative told us today, Serb citizens in Kosovo are not an issue because Serbs are protected under a very modern constitutional framework established in 2008. I am proud to say that we have the most modern Constitution in Europe with respect to giving minorities extraordinary rights, not only in terms of representation, but in terms of participation at every level of State Government and in every type of institution. The rights of Serbs are not in question. Rather, the issue is how to gain political influence, not recognize reality as it is and treat Kosovo as a country that does not really exist. But we do exist, and we will continue to exist, and every day we are gaining more and more international support. The Republic of Kosovo has shown and will continue to show that democracy and European values are the foundation of our country. So if one looks at the approval rates of various countries in the Western Balkans, it is clear that Kosovo has more than 90 per cent approval for the European Union and more than 90 per cent approval for NATO membership and NATO alignment. So we are on our way, doing the work we were elected to do, and we urge the Council very, very strongly — we know that the war in Ukraine is taking a lot of the time that it has to deal with other regions of the world, but this is happening now, not in 1999, in the Western Balkans — to please send the right messages to those who want to destabilize the region. The investment of the international community in peace and stability in the Balkans is too huge to just ignore what is happening now and what the signals are.

The President: The representative of Albania has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I will not argue with Minister Selaković, for many reasons, because even when we disagree, we can do that in Belgrade or in Tirana. We do not need to take up the Council's time. But I am speaking since it is hard to agree with everything that I heard, and since I heard that he ended his second remarks by referring to an obsession we continue to hear about, unfortunately — greater Albania.

Let me tell you the perspective that we in Albania have, and I hope that we share it with all Western Balkans neighbours and partners. What we care about in Albania is not greater this or greater that. We care about building open Balkans, not broken Balkans, because broken we have had. We want to have united Balkans, not ignited Balkans, because ignited we have had. We want everyone around the table, including Serbia and Kosovo together, and no one on the menu.

That is because we know where we come from, and we have seen the worst, as I mentioned. If we have drawn any lessons from the tragedies of the 1990s, it is what can happen if we let ourselves be taken in by misjudgments and wrong ideas and if we do not have the courage to face reality and move on. We should not let extremists and extremist ideas anywhere dictate our agendas.

Indeed, youth in Pristina, Tirana and Belgrade want the same thing: a better life, freedom, opportunities and to join the European Union. We should be able to give them that, not only because it is just, but because now we can.

Let us not forget that nothing good can come from working to harm one's neighbour. Instead, there are only benefits when one does everything to work for good, look ahead and share the dividends of good-neighbourliness; as the French say, "*A bon entendeur, salut*". And I say to the Minister, no, the only great and greater goal that we have on our agenda is joining the European Union.

The President: The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I respectfully request that he make these his concluding remarks.

Mr. Selaković (Serbia): I have to react to what I heard about Mr. Dick Marty. The Republic of Serbia finds it unfortunate that unverified information was

disseminated to the international public that caused great damage to the reputation of the Republic of Serbia and its intelligence services and all those who have performed their duties in full compliance with the law.

The Republic of Serbia and its relevant security and intelligence services remain, as before, open to international cooperation with their partners and expect those claims to be checked as soon as possible. It is not good to allow someone's tendentious and creative construction of a conspiracy to abuse this United Nations forum, because it can only harm the trial that is in progress in the Specialist Chambers for Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) war crimes in The Hague, putting additional pressure on key war-crimes witnesses, who are actually bearing witness about trafficking in human organs.

On this occasion, Serbia praises Dick Marty for the courage he showed, aware of the danger he exposed himself to, when in 2010, in his report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, he shared his horrific findings about the crimes committed by the so-called KLA. I also have to react to one sentence; I heard that "Serbs are protected in Kosovo". If Serbs are protected, why is it that more than 200,000 internally displaced Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija cannot return to their homes, to their apartments? If they are protected, why for more than 15 years have there been more than 43,000 pending court cases on property issues, property that was taken by force from those Kosovo Serbs who are protected? Imagine how those who are not protected are living there.

I fully agree with what was said by the Permanent Representative of the neighbouring Republic of Albania, of course, that we are willing to see open Balkans, including all non-European Union member States and entities from the Western Balkans. We are willing to see there not only Albania and North Macedonia but also Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Montenegro; we have also invited Pristina, and they accepted that invitation in the Washington agreement. But after that, it was refused by Albin Kurti. I was not speaking about the goals of the Republic of Albania, with which we have very good relations, but I was saying that Albin Kurti is the one who was not willing to engage in a process of dialogue but willing to have a greater Albania. That is what he stated on numerous occasions.

And just to end, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for the occasion to refer to those words. But I have to say something more. Even Ukraine, which is, as is Russia,

a country friendly to the Republic of Serbia, did not recognize so-called Kosovo, for the obvious reasons.

The President: Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz has asked for the floor to make a further statement. Likewise, I respectfully ask that she make this the concluding statement.

Ms. Gërvalla-Schwarz: I really tried to skip this, but it is not possible, because we need to put facts up against lies. The protection of minorities in Kosovo is stronger than in most countries in Europe and beyond. We have provisions in our Constitution, in our laws, in our administrative practice. Our army and our police are ethnically mixed because we wanted them to be, and, yes, we are proud of that.

The Constitution of Kosovo guarantees 20 out of 120 seats for minorities exclusively, let alone the fact that they can compete for the other 100 seats as well. Half of the 20 reserved seats, that is, 10, are exclusively reserved for the second most numerous ethnic minority, the Serb minority. So, within the privileges for the minorities, there is a privilege again for the Serb minority.

Let me describe an example of one specific practical impact of our protection rights. The constitutional provision led to the result that our coalition, which won more than 50 per cent of the vote in the last election, did not get a majority of seats in Parliament. Even if we had won the majority of seats, our Constitution requires that the Government of the Republic of Kosovo include ministers from the minorities, regardless of the election outcome.

We have a follower, a supporter, of Mr. Vučić from Serbia in our Government. The scale of minority protection is not found in any other country in Europe or beyond. Our country was born out of genocide, as I said. Mr. Vučić was part of the system of Milošević, and he propagated that genocide as a heroic act. He has never apologized, but just recently threatened Kosovo again and again. His hard-core fan sits with me and the others at the table in Cabinet meetings. Can one just imagine that in any other country in the neighbourhood?

I therefore have a clear message to the Serb propagandists: stop those lies; simply stop those lies. Nobody, not the people sitting here or others outside, takes those lies seriously. One should follow the example of Kosovo before criticizing. I have an invitation to all who would criticize without knowing the facts. We invite everyone who criticizes such provisions, saying

that it is not enough to first implement half of those guarantees in their own countries — only half, maybe even only a third. They should try to do that. I ask that they provide the equivalent of 20 out of 120 seats for minorities in their Parliaments. They should guarantee their most adversarial opposition who is directed by a hostile foreign country a seat at their Government's table. That is obviously a rhetorical request. Each country has to decide on its own.

But the following remark is on a serious note. We are not only a small, but also a proud country. We are also one of the most tolerant countries with regard to religion and respect for others. That is our tradition and our DNA.

Speaking again about Dick Marty, I must share a very private experience. I was aged 10 when my father, being a journalist, writer and musician, needed to leave Kosovo. He escaped the former Yugoslavia to go to Germany. It was by the then-called *Uprava državne bezbednosti*, or State Security Administration, now called the State Security, that he was assassinated in Germany at the age of 36 because of his standing up for the freedom of Kosovo. It is the same service that assassinated more than 59 Croat dissidents in Germany. There is a long tradition in having that service assassinate people outside the country. That is an old experience.

Regarding what Mr. Marty told us, he is not a friend of Kosovo. He has never been, and will never be, a friend of Kosovo, because the court will prove that what he stated in the report is not true. Even mentioning that Dick Marty is a friend of Serbia, and it has been difficult for him to tell the public that it was Serbia that wanted to kill him and to blame Kosovo for that, that is a long tradition. Every one of us knows

that. Members know that. I know that. Those respected people know that.

With regard to the President who was mentioned, and it is an old thing from October last year — yes, I have a President. My President attended last year's meeting in October (see S./PV.8880). We are very proud to have a President. Her name is Ms. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu. She is one of the youngest Presidents in the world. She is a highly respected woman who has a long experience in politics in Kosovo. Through her courage, she has shown how the future of the Balkans in the European Union can be.

I will conclude with greater countries in the Balkans. Always stating something that Prime Minister Kurti mentioned in the past will not help the present or the future, because talking about the past is not a fair game with Serbia. Talking only about the past makes one look bad. That is why we try to talk about the present and the future. There are others talking about and acting against neighbours to change borders in the Balkans and elsewhere. We have Vladimir Putin talking about changing borders through war, and we have ministers in the Government of Aleksandar Vučić who talk about Serbia. Having members of Government who use the terminology of the 1990s and of Slobodan Milošević now in these very fragile times is not how we should behave.

I want to repeat that Kosovo is very committed to contributing constructively not only to the dialogue with our northern neighbour, under the facilitation of the European Union and with the help of other partners and allies, but also, at the same time, to providing a contribution for peace and stability in the world and showing that we are a reliable partner and ally for all those who believe in us.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.