



Statement by H.E. Mr. Ivica Dacic, first deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia:

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Zahir Tanin, for the submission of the Report and congratulate the President of the Security Council for a successful stewardship of the affairs of the Council during the month of August. I also recognize all the members of the Security Council.

Mr. President,

Day in and day out, the representatives of the Member States of the United Nations Security Council deal with the issues that pose a security threat as they strive to fulfil the principal task entrusted to them by the Charter: the safeguarding of international peace. In doing so, they often encounter problems the causes of which were created decades, even centuries ago. Presumably, the distinguished Members of the Council are not familiar, nor can they be, with all details, including the tiny ones, and all facts of each and every problem that they are called upon to resolve. This makes the obligation ever greater for those who come before the Council to present to this distinguished body only the facts that they have checked and that are true. Serbia's representatives, Mr. President, have always made every effort to address the Council in a constructive manner, desirous of making a contribution to the process of reconciliation and the stability in the region, as well as to the dialogue conducted in Brussels. Priština's representatives, however, continue to pile on the Council falsehoods and lies and have lately engaged in outright propagandizing.

At the last meeting of the Security Council, convened to consider the situation in Kosovo and Metohija on 16 May 2016, in addition to other fabrications, we heard that the Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija "were denied [...] the right to play" and that Albanian youngsters were

"being beaten and arrested by the Serbian police just because they were playing football." An uninformed listener could have thought that a scene on a territory controlled by ISIL was being described. The next image he could have conjured up was a public execution of players on the pitch.

Like in most countries in this world, football is the most popular sport in Serbia. Surely, the most widely known club from the southern Serbian province is Priština FC; its golden era was the mid-1980s when it competed in Yugoslavia's Federal League I. Priština's best player ever was Fadil Vokrri, the current President of the so-called Football Association of Kosovo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This very same Fadil Vokrri, completing his spell with Priština, decided in 1986 to join no other club but Partizan of Belgrade. Not Partizani of Tirana, but Partizan of Belgrade where he played full three years, incidentally while Slobodan Milošević was in power. During that period, Fadil Vokrri was capped 12 times playing for Yugoslavia and in a match with Flamurtari of Albania he scored one goal and was voted man of the match. In his own words, he supports Belgrade's Partizan also today. In addition to Vokrri, other Kosovo and Metohija Albanian footballers played for Partizan, too, some of whom are legends of the club.

Does it sound believable to you that a player, allegedly abused, beaten and discriminated against only because he is a member of a national minority, plays for the national team and a major club from the capital of that country for years?

Some of you, I suppose, are surprised if not even astonished considering what you heard at the last meeting. Nothing can surprise me and I am ready to hear, in a matter of minutes, new falsehoods, new lies, new propaganda outbursts.

One of the mantras, perpetuated de rigueur, as it were, by all representatives of Priština is that Kosovo and Metohija Albanians had been loyal and good citizens of Yugoslavia before Slobodan Milošević took over the reins of power. This contention is just another historically unfounded fabrication propagated unsparingly to the international community with the aim of winning support for separatism and ethnic cleansing conducted systematically in Kosovo and Metohija in the last one hundred years.

It is clear that systematic nationalism and separatism are at work in Kosovo and Metohija, the ideological backbone of which has been the League of Prizren, founded in 1878 with one goal alone: to unify all territories in the Balkans populated by Albanians into one State, bringing into question the territorial integrity not only of Serbia, but also of FYROM, Montenegro, Greece and other countries in the region. Unfortunately, it is patently evident that some individuals, countries and international organizations have played a role in this regard as evinced by the example of William Walker, former Head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission; on the basis of his hastily-cobbled assessments about Račak, a decision was made to bomb Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Today, 17 years after, William Walker is an honorary citizen of Albania, he is a hero of Kosovo and had multiple decorations awarded by Priština. William Walker is one of the few of those who openly oppose the establishment of a special court to try

crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army, the establishment of which has been supported by this Council, and recently said on Albania television's Top Channel that he supports the idea of Greater Albania, i.e. the unification of Albania and Kosovo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ms. Çitaku will, presumably, speak about genocide and ethnic cleansing again; this, however, is just another propaganda exercise and a lie. The basic definition of genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing is a destruction or expulsion of population. Serbia's representatives are on record of stating, million upon million of times, that each and every crime should be punished; yet, history does not record a 'genocide' after which members of the people which allegedly committed a genocide are 10 times less in number than before, while the number of the people against which the genocide has allegedly been committed is substantially higher than before.

I would like you to remember that, out of 427 localities, the Serbs have been expelled from 311. This is ethnic cleansing, of Serbs, however. The statistics is a frightful and self-defeating reading. And the data that I shall present are not from the Serbian sources, they are the results of the 1981 census from the time of Tito, before Milošević, and the results of the census taken in Kosovo by the Priština authorities in 2011.

In 1981, 43 875 Serbs lived in Priština and, according to the census of 2011, 430. One hundred times less, ladies and gentlemen! In 1981, 140 043 Albanians lived in this city and in 2011, 194 953. Nowthen, is it a genocide, crime or ethnic cleansing of Albanians? In 1981, 18 285 Serbs lived at Uroševac, in 2011, 32, six hundred times less. In 1981, 17 791 Serbs and Montenegrins lived in Peć, in 2011, 332. The Serbian Orthodox Church was established in Peć in XIII century and the Patriarchate of Peć, included in the UNESCO List of World Heritage, is located in this town. In 1981, 1 898 Serbs lived in Đakovica, today 17 Serbs live there. At Podujevo, they numbered 2 242, today 12, almost two hundred times less. In 1981, 11 651 Serbs lived in Prizren, the XIV-century throne town of Serbia and, incidentally, the town in which I was born, only 27 of them live there today. Four hundred times less... . And what else am I supposed to say? Any comment is vacuous in the face of this truth, the statistics and the facts. Let the distinguished representative of Priština engage in propaganda.

The current, as well as every future Report of the Secretary-General on the work of UNMIK should be viewed also in this broader historical context that testifies to the complexity of the situation in and in connection with Kosovo and Metohija and may contribute to a better understanding of the genesis of this question.

The Report in front of us has been structured somewhat differently from the previous ones. It introduces new sections, on normalization of relations between Belgrade and Priština and partnership and cooperation, for instance. In the part related to the normalization of relations, the importance of the Community of Serb Municipalities is presented inadequately; reduced, it appears, to an administrative item, it is fleetingly referred to in paragraphs 18 and 19 of the Report. As is known, the Community has not yet been established. Let me recall also on this occasion that the quest for an agreement in Brussels was motivated by an aspiration to find a way to protect, systematically and institutionally, the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija

because of the non-existence of proper institutional mechanisms for an effective protection of its interests. Under the Brussels Agreement, it is exactly the Community of Serb Municipalities that is charged with that task whereby it is linked substantively to UNSCR 1244 (1999). Instead of being the central issue to be effectuated expeditiously, its establishment has become the subject of political blackmail. After all, Vice-President of the United States Joe Biden also said during his recent visit to Belgrade and Priština that it is necessary to establish the Community of Serb Municipalities expeditiously as a condition for the process of regional stability and reconciliation proceed.

I have to note that this Report makes no mention of the situation of the Serbian and other communities south of the Ibar River, either, where the majority of the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija live. In doing so, I would like to emphasize that not all problems are, nor can they be, related exclusively to the area north of the Ibar River. Disregard of the human rights and the problems encountered by the Serbs and the members of other communities, especially the Goranci, south of the Ibar River amplifies their feelings of isolation, neglect and hopelessness. The manner in which the concept document of the Kosovo authorities related to returns is mentioned in the Report creates a fictitious picture that Priština is doing something serious in this regard. However, the past experiences give us cause to believe otherwise. The absence of credible census data is invoked as a reason or an excuse for a whole range of concrete problems, from returns to the failure to adopt budgets in the four municipalities in the northern part of the Province. All along, however, it is glossed over that a census engineered and politically motivated from Priština is unacceptable for a number of reasons and that such a census could hardly be used to improve the situation of the Serbs. After all, the situation can be improved even without a census if only a good will existed. And the incorporation of the sections on the rule of law and human rights under one heading accounts for the disappearance of the aspect of the human rights of the members of the minority communities under the radar.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To note simply that the level of returns is unacceptably low is not good enough; concrete reasons are needed to explain why the situation is so worrisome. Let me mention only some of them, from the administrative, institutional and legal obstacles to returns and the lack of security to the election of the internally displaced persons to integrate locally in central Serbia, which is not an act of a conscious and desired choice but a result of the absence of any other alternative. The question of return is inseparably linked to the protection and realization of the property rights of the Serbian population, including the internally displaced persons.

The fact, the self-defeating fact, Mr. President, is that sustainable returns have been realized only by some 4 000 persons or 1.9 per cent. A tedious regurgitation of partial statistics related to assaults on the life, security and the property of the Serbs and other non-Albanians is tantamount to casting a pall of relativity onto a civilizationally inadmissible phenomenon: persecution on the ethnic or religious basis. Inadmissible are also numerous cases of desecration, destruction and attacks on Serbian cultural and religious sites, as well as the spreading of falsehoods, such as the one that mass graves are located by the Church of Christ the Saviour in Priština. These fabrications have been spread for years now. The Director of the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Priština said on 14 June that a witness had come out who

testified that excavations had been made on 12 and 13 June 1999 and that it is therefore reasonably believed that the bodies of Kosovo and Metohija Albanians were buried at this location. At Belgrade's request, excavations were made on two occasions, on 13-14 and 27 July this year. The excavations were attended by the Kosovo representatives alongside EULEX and the representatives of Belgrade; it was established that there are no human remains or graves at the location. The spreading of the misinformation was primarily a function of seizing the lot in downtown Priština on which the Church and the appurtenant land are located and the defamation of the Serbian Orthodox Church. And just to recall: the Church has never been completed and is turned by the Priština authorities into a public lavatory and a podium to shoot music videos featuring scantily clad songstresses, telltale evidence, Mr. President, of Priština's attitude towards the Serbian cultural and religious heritage.

The returns realized thus far testify that all actors involved have failed the process of return. It is upon all of us to change it and create conditions in which the displaced persons will be given the choice of return or local integration not only in words but also in deeds. To do so, though, it is necessary to fulfil the elementary conditions in places of return regarding personal and property security, infrastructure and access to public services. In that sense, I salute the call made in the Report to the leaders of all sides to re-focus on safe and sustainable returns of the internally displaced persons.

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

What all Reports of the Secretary-General, including this one, have in common is the failure to characterize the incidents in Kosovo and Metohija as ethnically motivated. The Report says, in one short sentence alone, that 86 incidents affecting members of minority communities were reported "with most victims reported to be Kosovo Serbs". Not a single other word at all, Mr. President. What is missing is an account of institutional reaction by relevant police, prosecutorial and judicial authorities. Short of it, all attacks and other criminal offences against Serbs are depersonalized and reduced to statistics. The ultimate and most dangerous consequence of such an approach is gradual acceptance by all, including the international community, of virtual impunity for criminal offences committed against the Serbs and other non-Albanians, including murder. To the distance traversed to deny the rights to the Serbian community testifies Priština's ban of the import of textbooks in the Serbian language into Kosovo and Metohija. It existed also before, albeit sporadically, but the confiscation of all books in the Serbian language became a regular practice at the beginning of June wherefore the St. Vitus Day Book Fair, scheduled to take place at Gračanica from 15 June to 1 July, had to be called off.

Security in Kosovo and Metohija has always been unstable. The radicalization of the political climate and the worsening of the security situation because of the rise of political and religious extremism only increased the instability. The Report in front of us contains references to ISIL fighters who hail from Kosovo and Metohija. With respect to the size of population, the Kosovo and Metohija Albanians account for the largest percentage of those fighting in the ranks of this terrorist organization. The worrisome consequences of the situation are too apparent to bespeak.

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

In the interest of regional stability and ever better Serbian-Albanian relations, the Republic of Serbia will continue the dialogue between Belgrade and Priština. We shall continue the policy of peaceful settlement of conflicts by addressing normalization of relations responsibly and implementing the agreements reached in Brussels fully. The question of Kosovo and Metohija transcends the question of territorial integrity and national identity; it is the tipping point that will define, long-term, the Serbian-Albanian relations on which depend the stability and economic prospects of the entire region. Irrespective of the frequent lack of constructiveness on the other side, we shall continue to work arduously on strengthening relations, building confidence and promoting European values and perspectives for both peoples. We do not want the situation in Kosovo and Metohija to be a latent threat to the stability and progress of Serbia and the region and shall work, in good faith, on solving disputes peacefully, well aware that a long process lies ahead in which, to make things worse, we often lack a collocutor to share with us a vision of a prosperous and politically forward-looking region.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I call on the countries that have not recognized the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo to persevere, despite the pressures that many of you are exposed to, in your consistent respect for international law, United Nations Charter and the supreme authority of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security, the UNSCR 1244 (1999) of which upholds the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. Bear in mind that support by the international community is of key importance for success in the dialogue between Belgrade and Priština, one of few successful examples of peaceful settlement of disputes in the world. Change in the position of States that have not recognized the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo would affect negatively the continuation of constructive attitude of the parties in the dialogue and the implementation of the agreements reached so far. This is what we ask for: an opportunity for dialogue and agreement in full accordance with international law instead of unilateral acts and disrespect for the norms of the international legal order. Let me remind that international law is universal and that it applies to all, which is true also of its violation. And what Serbia has experienced since 1998/99 may befall any other country in the world.

At the same time, Mr. President, I call on the countries that use their statements in this esteemed body to call for the violation of its legally-binding resolutions not to do so. Let me repeat: under UNSCR 1244 (1999), adopted in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, Kosovo and Metohija is part of the Republic of Serbia, under interim administration of a United Nations Mission. This resolution continues to be the valid legal basis of the administrative regime in Kosovo and Metohija which can be changed only by the adoption of a new Security Council resolution, which has not happened thus far. I take this opportunity to call also on the countries that have recognized the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo to reconsider their decision against the background of all-important facts.

Thank you for your attention.