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Kosovo Transitional Council Briefed on Election Preparations

PRISTINA—Describing his recent talks with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Ismail Cem as “fruitful”, SRRSG Dr Bernard Kouchner today told the Kosovo Transitional Council that UNMIK was now in a position to better protect the rights of the Turkish community in Kosovo. He said the Turkish community will be able to use its language, along with Albanian and Serbian, in the municipalities in which they live.

However, Dr. Kouchner made it clear that it was not possible to make Turkish a third official language of Kosovo along with Albanian and Serbian.

Dr. Kouchner informed the KTC of his proposed meetings with the representatives of the Bosniac, Roma and Turkish communities during the course of this week, starting today. Later in the week he will begin a series of visits to municipalities and communities in Kosovo “to speak directly to the people and listen to them. I want to explain to them directly what UNMIK is doing and what we are planning to do in the future. I intend to continue these visits in September”, he added.

He said preparations for the elections were continuing. Technical aspects such as the size of the ballot paper were being discussed.

DSRSG Mr. Daan Everts said the OSCE had discussed the issue of ballot design with the various political parties and the matter will be taken up in the Central Election Commission (CEC) this Friday. He said the political parties had submitted names of nearly 6000 candidates and these lists are being reviewed by the OSCE to see which candidates meet the criteria for eligibility. The CEC will take a final decision on these lists by 18 August. About 30 per cent of the candidates are women. Another election related issue was the order of names and parties on the ballot paper. At present they were thinking of using the lottery system, but they were open to suggestions on this issue. There are 20 political parties, 15 individual candidates, two coalitions and three citizens initiatives which had registered for the elections, he said.

Mr. Everts regretted that no Serbian party had registered for the elections, though one party had attempted to register itself in Leposavic, but it backed out of because of intimidation.

The co-heads of the department of Public Services, Mr. Behxet Brajshori and Mr. Peter Schumann, gave a detailed briefing on the JIAS departments. Mr. Brajshori said most departments have been officially established, although the regulations on culture, civil security and emergency preparedness, non-resident affairs and trade and industry, are in different stages of preparation.

Mr. Brajshori said the initial difficulty of finding qualified international and Kosovar staffers for the JIAS departments, is now being overcome, though the situation is still not satisfactory. He mentioned paucity of funds as the main problem in recruiting Kosovar staffers. He said the only solution was to raise domestic revenues and cut down dependence on donor funds. At present 1332 Kosovars are employed by the JIAS departments, excluding people employed in the municipalities.

Mr. Schumann mentioned some of the achievements of the JIAS departments such as opening of the swimming pool, restarting postal services and telephone networks and opening of the airport.

Several members raised critical questions about the JIAS departments and some recent events, including the escape of the three Serbian prisoners from the Mitrovica hospital. Another member asked about the retirement of 44 doctors ordered by the JIAS department of health and social security.

DSRSG Tom Koenigs explained that steps like the retirement of doctors were often dictated by budget constraints.

KFOR and UNMIK Police provided a security briefing to the KTC members.