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Transfer Council Meets, Forms Three Working Groups

PRISTINA – SRSG Michael Steiner and Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi today co-chaired the first meeting of the Transfer Council, comprising senior officials from UNMIK and ministers from the Provisional Government.

Speaking to journalists after the meeting, which lasted nearly 90 minutes, SRSG Michael Steiner said “the meeting was about organizing and managing the transfer process. It was entirely about Chapter 5 – not reserved powers. This has been our consistent message”, he emphasised.

He said the Council had decided to set up three working groups, which would report back to the Council by 15 May. These groups are: 1) finance, logistics and recruitment, 2) technical assistance and 3) monitoring and intervention.

The three working groups, SRSG Michael Steiner said “will be guided – like the whole process – by two principles: competencies to be transferred to competent institutions and that transfer is not a one-way street. We will strengthen our capacity to intervene. Not if they make mistakes as everyone makes mistakes, but if they act in violation of the law.”

The SRSG said that on the basis of government proposals, over 40 remaining areas were to be transferred to Provisional Institutions. These are “principally in areas of economy and budget, agriculture, social and public services. They range from significant ones like the appointment of the director of the Tax Administration to less significant ones like the Department of Plant Protection”, Mr. Steiner said. “This is not high politics but the nitty gritty of competent administration.”

SRSG Michael Steiner said that Chapter 8, relating to reserved powers was not discussed in today’s meeting, as said earlier. “The reserved powers cannot be transferred,” he stated, adding “but there needs to be greater institutional engagement in these areas, which will be decided later”.

The Government, he said, had presented a letter with further ideas, which will be addressed in the course of the process.

SRSB Michael Steiner regretted the fact that the Kosovo Serbs didn't participate in today's meeting. "We have provided for the inclusion of Kosovo Serb representatives. We want this to be a transparent process. We need a cooperative approach, we need to work together to improve things for everyone in Kosovo."

"We're aware of critics from both sides— some want to stop the process, some want competencies now where there is no competence yet. We will stay on course and I will hand over all the competencies I can, by the end of the year, to competent hands."

SRSB Michael Steiner said that if we step back and look at the process, UNMIK has had a coherent line. "What we're doing is consistent with the implementation of 1244. We had elections in November 2001 and a year ago the Government was formed. Since then there has been a gradual transfer of competencies, as asked by Kosovo leaders such as President Rugova and Mr. Thaci. And I will transfer all the competencies I legally can by the end of the year as expressly demanded by the Security Council in February," Mr. Steiner stated.

Prime Minister Rexhepi also spoke to the press.