

Contact Group Statement – Rome, 29 April 1998

Contact Group

Statement

1. The Contact Group met in Rome on April 29 to decide on next steps regarding the increasingly dangerous situation in Kosovo, taking into account the report of the OSCE Troika on developments since the Bonn Contact Group Ministerial. They considered the report an important and balanced contribution to the assessment of the situation. The Contact Group believes that the current situation is untenable. The risk of an escalating conflict requires immediate action.
2. All members of the Contact Group are firmly opposed to independence for Kosovo and to a continuation of the unacceptable status quo. Immediate steps by the parties to reduce tension and to begin an unconditional dialogue are indispensable, and the only way to reverse the deterioration in the situation and bring about a political solution.
3. The Contact Group condemns the increase in violence in recent days in Kosovo, in particular the excessive use of force by the Yugoslav Army, and the proliferation of arms in the territory. The Contact Group rejects absolutely terrorism as a means of bringing about political change as well as all other violence to suppress political dissent. The Contact Group calls on political leaders in the FRY and in the countries of the region to exercise maximum restraint, full respect for human rights, to prevent the introduction of arms and of armed groups from outside, and to condemn terrorism. It

also calls on the countries of the region to confirm the respect for territorial integrity and for the inviolability of internationally recognised borders.

4. The Contact Group is not seeking to impose any particular outcome for the resolution of the differences between Belgrade and Kosovo Albanian leadership. It is for the parties themselves to determine a solution to the political status of Kosovo through negotiations. The Contact Group notes that representatives of Belgrade and Pristina have recently stated their general willingness to open unconditional dialogue. But the two sides have yet to agree with full authority on modalities for talks, particularly on the issue of international participation.
5. The Contact Group regards an appropriate international involvement as an essential factor to establish confidence between the parties and to facilitate talks.
6. To begin the urgent process of dialogue, the Contact Group recommends, and urges both Belgrade and Kosovo Albanian leadership to adopt, a framework for dialogue and a stabilisation package:
 1. The framework should be based on fundamental principles that the parties must accept, such as rejection of violence for achieving political goals, no preconditions, mutual respect, accordance with standards and principles of the OSCE and of the UN Charter, mutually agreed modalities, and protection of all individuals and ethnic groups. There should be mutual assurances, which the Contact Group itself will support, that the parties will not abandon nor seek to undermine an agreement once it is reached. The framework for dialogue must be formally endorsed by the top leadership in Belgrade and the leadership of the Kosovo Albanians. The respective leaders must take political responsibility for initiating good-faith talks. The framework must provide for

international involvement in facilitating substantive negotiations.

2. The stabilisation package must include, as the minimum:

- Cessation of repression by the Authorities in Belgrade, as specified in UNSCR 1160, and a strong condemnation of terrorism by the Kosovo Albanian leadership.
- Reopening of the OSCE missions in the FRY, including Kosovo.
- Concrete inter-communal confidence building measures, including implementation of the education agreement according to the agreed timetable. The Contact Group appreciates and encourages the work of Sant'Egidio Community in this field.

7. The Contact Group attaches the highest priority to the immediate launching of the Gonzalez mission, which is essential for substantial progress in the relationship between FRY and the international community. This mission is also meant to reduce tension, restore confidence and improve general prospects for dialogue. The top leadership in Belgrade should therefore immediately invite the Gonzalez mission to start its work. The Contact Group fully supports the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in his efforts to facilitate this mission.

8. If the leadership in Belgrade agrees to the framework for dialogue, the stabilisation measures listed in para.6 are implemented, the Gonzalez mission is launched, and substantive talks begin, the Contact Group will promote a clear and achievable path towards Belgrade's full integration in the international community, including participation in the OSCE. We want the FRY to reap the benefits of membership in international financial and political institutions.

9. Crucial requirements set out in the Contact Group's

statements of 9 and 25 March have not yet been met. We have therefore decided to take action to put into effect a freeze on the funds held abroad by the FRY and Serbian Governments. If Belgrade takes the steps in paragraph six to bring about negotiations, we will immediately reverse this decision. We have also decided that if dialogue is blocked because of Belgrade's non-compliance we will, by the 9th of May, take action to stop new investment in Serbia. The Russian Federation does not associate itself with these measures.

10. If unresolved, the situation in Kosovo threatens to spill over to other parts of the region. The Contact Group attaches high priority to supporting the security interests of the neighbouring States and to ensuring security of borders. It is of particular importance that developments in Kosovo should not disrupt progress in implementing the Dayton/Paris peace agreement in Bosnia, to which the Government in Belgrade is committed. The Contact Group will contribute to the strict implementation of Res. 1160, working also with the UN and other relevant international fora.
11. The next meeting of the Contact Group will take place in Paris in May.

Office of the High Representative