KOSOVO: ELEMENTS OF UK STRATEGY 2004/05

- On the arrival of the new SRSG, an ambitious programme should be set in train by UNMIK to transfer competences and authorities to Kosovo institutions. Economic responsibilities should be transferred to the PISG wholesale with the IFI's and Commission providing practical advice and assistance notably to the UNMIK/PISG economic plan for Kosovo. This would build on the Eide report – Eide made it clear that he envisaged a package – decentralisation for the Kosovo Serbs, increased transfer for the K-Albanians, in conjunction with a more interventionist, sanctioning approach by the SRSG, on the Ashdown model.

- In particular, priority work should continue on 3 key areas relating to minority communities: returns, including the new Ministry of Returns; introducing one or two decentralisation pilot projects [decentralisation is not only for K-Serbs but is part and parcel of more effective governance in Kosovo as a whole] and participation in the local security advisory group. These should be underway by the October elections. A way should be found for Belgrade to be informed, but not to exercise oversight. The Contact Group will need to handle Belgrade to avoid this. The Kosovo Serbs should be urged to participate in the elections and to rejoin the institutions.

- Standards before status needs to be updated. There should be a robust prioritisation, focusing on 5-8 standards regarding minority rights. UNMIK should be restructured to deliver these "minimum standards". The Kosovars should be told that these are the key standards for the mid-2005 Review to go ahead. (The remaining standards are part and parcel of transformation into a normal European State which will naturally take several years, whatever the Status settlement; they will need to be elided with the EU's STM (i.e. SAA process), as in Bosnia.)

- The Standards Review should be maintained, at the latest in mid-2005 (earlier if Kosovo manages to make progress on the minimum standards). Political Directors could announce this and the minimum standards in their interim assessment in the margins of UNGA in September. But it should be clear that conditionality is being deepened, not weakened ; ie that we expect to see concrete action taken and having effect to help minorities, not just commitments to do this. (We should develop a parallel strategy on messages to the Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians in the run up to the elections).

- There must be dialogue with Belgrade, covering developments on the ground, standards prioritisation, handling the Review and beyond. It should be made clear to Belgrade that a constructive approach to Kosovo (as with Bosnia) will help their EU integration prospects. There will be a role here for UNMIK but this should be supplemented by other private exchanges – e.g. by officials, or by appointing a senior, political "shuttle diplomat"; this will be easier to handle if done in concert with the Contact Group and/or UN. There have been some interesting signs from Belgrade recently on final status – we should take stock later in summer.