



settlement. A few years ago, we might have been able to negotiate a further interim settlement, with independence following in a much longer time frame. But the lack of real responsibility for the Kosovars has left that idea by the wayside. Anything Belgrade can offer now is already past the point the Kosovars could accept it.

8. We will need to be confident that the terms of any settlement are sufficient to allow those Serbs and other minorities who wish to, to stay in Kosovo and any who might wish to return to do so. Some will inevitably choose to leave although it is hard to judge at this stage how many. But we should not immediately assume the worst; those Serbs who have stayed in Kosovo since 1999 have already endured difficult times and probably want to stay on if they can. A settlement will need to allow them to do so, by putting in place robust guarantees for Kosovo's Serbs (eg on their role in central Government and protection for patrimonial sites) and other minorities. Certain attributes of independence (eg a seat at the UN) may need to be phased. Mitrovica (see below) and the three northern municipalities may need some form of special status on an interim basis.

9. But whatever the terms of the settlement, the international community will need to remain engaged on the ground for some time to ensure they are honoured. An ongoing NATO presence, including US troops, will be critical. Meanwhile, the EU will come increasingly to the fore, although still part of a wider international effort. It has already started preparations for a possible rule of law/police mission, quite possibly with executive powers.

Final Status Process

10. Ahtisaari plans to return to Belgrade and Pristina early in 2006. He expects both sides to have come up by then with detailed proposals on key issues, such as decentralisation and returns. Early direct talks seem unlikely; they would serve only to highlight differences and force both sides to take fixed positions. Set piece conferences on specific issues such as the economy may be needed in the future. Ahtisaari intends to delegate individual work themes to groups of experts. He has a small group of Special Advisers from the EU, the US and he is talking to the World Bank. The Russians will place an adviser in his team early in 2006. The EU has already appointed the Council Secretariat's Balkans Director, Stefan Lehne, to Ahtisaari's team. We are seeking to ensure that sound advice is provided on NATO issues. Ahtisaari has one formal deputy (Albert Rohan, a former Austrian diplomat).

11. Ahtisaari is not working to a particular timeframe. Our working assumption – as is the EU's – is that a settlement could be ready in about a year's time from now. Washington is keen to wrap the process up in 6 months. This is probably overly optimistic. But things may fall into place quickly, particularly if Belgrade chooses not to engage fully. The Guiding Principles