

## **CONTACT GROUP STATEMENT 31 JANUARY**

1. Contact Group Ministers together with the EU High Representative, the EU Presidency, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, the NATO Secretary-General and UN representatives including the UN Special Status Envoy and SRSG met on 31 January in London. Ministers express their profound regret over the loss of President Ibrahim Rugova, who had won the world's respect for his principled advocacy of human rights and democracy.
2. Ministers emphasise the importance they attach to a lasting Kosovo status settlement that promotes a multi-ethnic society. This would immeasurably enhance regional stability, as well as the European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives of Serbia, Kosovo and of the region as a whole. Ministers recall that the character of the Kosovo problem, shaped by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and consequent conflicts, ethnic cleansing and the events of 1999, and the extended period of international administration under UNSCR 1244, must be fully taken into account in settling Kosovo's status. UNSCR 1244 remains the framework for the ongoing status process, with the Security Council and Contact Group continuing to play key roles.
3. Ministers believe that all possible efforts should be made to achieve a negotiated settlement in the course of 2006. To this end, Ministers strongly support the work of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. They call on Belgrade and Pristina to work constructively with him to find realistic solutions to the many difficult issues that need to be addressed. These should include, inter alia, freedom of movement, transparent and constructive links between local communities in Serbia and Kosovo, mechanisms for resolving the fate of missing persons and a specific package of measures for the protection of religious communities and sites. Arrangements for good relations between Belgrade and Pristina and within the region must also be part of a settlement.
4. Ministers stress that effective provisions for the decentralisation of government will be crucial to the status settlement. Decentralisation can ensure that minority communities remain a vital part of Kosovo's future and give impetus to the return of displaced persons who should be able to choose where they live in Kosovo. Ministers call on the parties to engage seriously on this issue.