Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on the implementation of new customs arrangements in northern Kosovo

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement today:

"Today EULEX and KFOR started implementing new customs arrangements at the gates in northern Kosovo. These new arrangements aim at restoring normal trading relations and the lifting of the mutual trade embargoes between Serbia and Kosovo, in accordance with CEFTA rules and European values. I am pleased that trade has re-started in one direction today, and hope it can resume in both directions without delay. This is clearly in the interest of all communities, as it will allow them to trade freely and improve their lives.

Let me also reiterate that the implementation of the agreement on customs stamps is without prejudice to the question of status. It is about free trade and improving the rule of law in Kosovo. I look forward to continued work in the dialogue, allowing us to resolve problems and further improve the lives of the people of all communities in Kosovo.

I call on everybody in northern Kosovo to show restraint and remain calm. It is in the interest of all sides to defuse tensions, calm down rhetoric and act responsibly. Violence would be unacceptable.

I fully support the professional work of the EULEX mission. The operations at the gates will be conducted by qualified border-police and customs experts from EULEX, in line with its executive mandate. I also want to commend the EULEX special police units involved in the operation.

Let me also praise the excellent co-ordination between the EULEX and KFOR. I spoke today with NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen and we both underlined the importance of everybody acting responsibly in support of the rule of law."

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