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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

**Announcement of imminent closure of the
International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM)**

The International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM) will be forced to close its operations effective July 2017 after the academic year ends, if the Government of Kosovo does not deliver on its long-standing promises to take on its operational costs from international donors.

Closure will have a negative impact on the students (200), staff (35), families and the community in Mitrovica region. Furthermore, it will call into question the commitment by the Kosovo Government to the promotion of education and exchange among communities in this complex region.

Urgent request to Kosovo Government:

The international donors, IBCM and SPARK call upon the Government of Kosovo, particularly the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education Science and Technology, and the President of Kosovo to:

1. Urgently decide on emergency funding for IBCM and to release immediately at least the first year of funding, i.e. 600.000 euro, in line with the signed international agreement. Only in that way closure can be avoided.
2. Work with the next Kosovo Government and Assembly to soonest ratify the earlier approved international agreement to ensure longer term sustainability of IBCM and enable it to function as a non-profit higher education institution under its licence from MEST and Accreditation from German Evalag and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency.

In the absence of a positive decision by the Kosovo Government on emergency funding for IBCM, the College will be closed down in July 2017.

State of affairs:

- Donor contributions to IBCM have been depleted, will not be reactivated, and IBCM is out of budget.
- Kosovo Government should have started funding IBCM from January 1, 2017. The Government has reserved 3 million euro in its budget 2017 and approved an international agreement between the Ministry of Education/MEST and SPARK (interim manager). The agreement was signed by the Minister of Education and by SPARK on April 12, 2017. In the agreement it is clearly stated that SPARK will transfer its responsibilities a.s.a.p. to IBCM, making IBCM an independent non-profit institution;
- The international agreement was awaiting ratification by the Kosovo Assembly, which disbanded, due to a vote of non-confidence, thus making ratification technically impossible.

- In order to keep IBCM functioning, and awaiting Government funds that were due on January 1, 2017, SPARK has used 0.2 million euro of its own budget. This cannot continue.

Signed: the Embassies of Sweden, The Netherlands, Switzerland, SPARK and IBCM.

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In 2008 the Government of Kosovo decided it would open an international business college (IBCM) in Mitrovica and presented its initiative at the international donor conference in Brussels. Due to the complex environment in Mitrovica, the Government of Kosovo requested international support to realise its ambitious initiative. The Government made available 1.5 million euro for construction works of the campus in South Mitrovica, and provided a written pledge to international donors for future operational costs. It requested the international organisation SPARK to manage IBCM on an interim-basis, until the moment it would become an independent international non-profit college.

Following this request and taking into account the financial contribution of the Government, international donors, such as Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, the European Union, Switzerland have provided a total of 13.5 million euro of contributions until 1 January 2017.

Two large campus buildings have been constructed and are in use. International (German and Danish) accreditation of diplomas has been obtained on top of local Kosovo accreditation and licence by MEST.

The College has 200 students. More than 80% of graduates finds a job within 6 months of graduation. Many minority graduates now hold senior Kosovo administration positions. Student intake number have risen 30% in the last year and new registrations are up this year as well.

Since summer 2015 the Ministry of Education Science and Technology has been working on making good on the promise to cover the operational costs. Due to many delays in this process, until now no funds have been disbursed by the Government. This despite more than a year of intense efforts of the international donor community to work with the Government (up to the level of the President) to effectuate the agreement.

