



HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA

# Serbian Community in Kosovo : **Frozen Life in a Frozen Conflict**



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## Preface

This report presents findings of the survey the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia conducted in the period September-December 2018. The purpose was to examine the situation of the Serbian community, its perception of the future, what it is it fears of, expects from the Brussels dialogue and thinks about Belgrade and the Serbian List's attitude towards the problems plaguing it. The Committee's team of researchers toured Kosovo North interviewing citizens of Mitrovica North, Zvečan, Leposavić and Zubin Potok. The team also paid visit to Gračanica, Po-moravlje (Novo Brdo, Prekovce, Draganac Monastery, Klokot and Štrpce), as well as to Kosovo West (Orahovac, Peć, Goraždevac, Dečani and Velika Hoča).

Ongoing political developments – marked by attempts to invoke partition of Kosovo as a final solution, influences from a variety of international players, weakened EU's mobilizing capacity, regressive trends in the Western Balkans, etc. – only further confuse Kosovo Serbs, strengthen their sense of insecurity and add to anxieties about the future, especially among those living south of the Ibar River.

*January 2019.*



# I – Ahtisaari Plan and the Serbian Community

*We've been integrated since 2007, and I was involved in the process. That years inspired our hopes. Things have changed after 2007. This is quite another town now.*

*(Secondary school teacher from Gračanica)*

The situation of Kosovo Serbs dramatically changed after NATO intervention (1999); from a population predominant in every sense (though in the minority), Serbs turned into a minority exposed to all sorts of discrimination and harassment. According to the 1991 census 194,190 (9.9%) Serbs lived in Kosovo.<sup>1</sup> Albanians boycotted the census; their numbers were estimated at 1,600,000.<sup>2</sup> Not only because of the post-conflict climate but also Belgrade's pre-war warmongering propaganda and repressive policies, the international community was trying most of all to ensure Serbs' safety and adjust their position to European standards and criteria.

After NATO intervention the Republic of Serbia no longer had any authority over Kosovo (judiciary, army or police); governance was taken over by the international community in accordance with the UN SB Resolution 1244.<sup>3</sup> In almost no time the realities themselves placed the status of Kosovo on an imminent agenda. Following the outbreak of violence in 2004, the Contact Group (US, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Russia) set a general frame for a political settlement of the Kosovo problem, and in November 2005 adopted relevant criteria;

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1 <http://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-latn/oblasti/popis/prethodni-popisi/popisni-podaci-eksel-tabele/>

2 <http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/2065/demografske-promene-kosova-u-periodu-1948-2006.pdf>

3 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/172/89/PDF/N9917289.pdf?OpenElement>.

to sum up: nothing can be as it used to be, and partition and unification with Albanian are out of question. The Contact group also said no to “status before standards.” As it turned out, however, the latter was over-ambitious given that it was only after 2000 that Kosovo began establishing its institutions (under international supervision) and needed time to make them stable and operative.

On November 5 2005 Martti Ahtisaari was appointed UN special envoy for the status of Kosovo.<sup>4</sup> His plan was not adopted by SC as Russia and China vetoed it for reasons of their own. Regardless of this failure, the Ahtisaari Plan made the foundation for Kosovo’s independence declaration (2008).<sup>5</sup> It was integrated into the Kosovo Constitution. Following independence declaration, the International Steering Group for Kosovo was formed (composed of 23 countries that promptly recognized Kosovo’s independence). The Group’s mandate expired in 2012.<sup>6</sup>

The Ahtisaari Plan made it possible for Serbs to set up local institutions of their own and maintain ties with Serbia but within a multiethnic state of Kosovo. The plan envisaged new municipalities with Serbian majority population – Mitrovica North included – with considerable self-governance in the domains of healthcare, education and social policy, and election of a local police chief. Pursuant to it, these municipalities would be entitled to ensure their own financing, including grants from central government (in Pristina) and financial contribution from Belgrade. They could also form associations with other municipalities, including municipalities in Serbia proper. The overall intention was clear – to make it possible for Serbs in these municipalities to live “in two worlds” in parallel, in Serbia and in Kosovo.

Certain issues, however, were left to be defined in the process of time, either through agreements or practice. This mostly related to the

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4 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/sga955.doc.htm>.

5 <https://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/Comprehensive%20Proposal%20.pdf>.

6 The International Steering Group for Kosovo (ISG) was an organization formed pursuant to the Ahtisaari Plan concerning the Kosovo status process. It was set up to guide Kosovo’s democratic development and promote good governance, multi-ethnicity and the rule of law.

central government's precise role when it came to ties with Belgrade, and detailed policies in some domains such as education.

Ever since the Steering Group's mandate came to an end (2012) and it claimed that Kosovo had fulfilled all the preconditions set up in the Ahtisaari Plan, Kosovo's Constitution has stood for the one and only legal frame for the country. Decentralization process resulted in ten municipalities with majority Serbian population. In cooperation with Serbia municipalities were allowed to receive financial and technical assistance from Serbian institutions.

Municipalities of Gračanica, Ranilug, Klokot, Štrpce, Novo Brdo and Parteš are now functioning under the Kosovo law. Due to the Brussels Agreement four municipalities in Kosovo North have made progress in the process of integration and respect for the rule of law. Those municipalities participated in local elections in Kosovo in 2013. Kosovo's jurisdiction over police, customs, judiciary, etc. put an end to parallel institutions.

Ten seats in Kosovo's parliament are set aside for Kosovo Serbs (inasmuch as for all non-Serb communities put together); each seat won in elections in an extra. Serbs are also entitled to ministerial offices (3 are reserved for them) and an office of a vice-premier. Pursuant to the Ahtisaari Plan and Kosovo's Constitution alike, Serbs are guaranteed more rights than other minority communities in Kosovo.

Municipalities south of the Ibar River have participated in local elections and integrated into Kosovo's system since 2009; accordingly, citizens' perceptions of the status for Kosovo differ from those of their compatriots in North Kosovo.

## 1. Pristina–Belgrade dialogue: parties with different goals and interests

*With the Brussels Agreement signed I became aware that I was living in the state of Kosovo, and this feeling hurts me no more*

*(Zvečan)*

In 2013 Serbia and Kosovo signed the Brussels Agreement on Normalization.<sup>7</sup> Soon after Serbia started negotiating its accession to EU, while in 2015 Kosovo signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU.

Though the International Court of Justice decided that Kosovo's independence declaration was not contrary to the international law<sup>8</sup>, Serbia would not acknowledge the new realities, including the fact that over 110 countries have recognized Kosovo as an independent state; hence, the Brussels negotiations have been mirroring two parties' differing goals and interests. Serbia wants to access EU, improve its political and economic relations with the international community and gradually close the Kosovo question, while Kosovo is after integration of its Serb-populated north that makes up 10 percent of its territory, membership of international organizations and, and Serbia's and five remaining EU member-states' (Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain and Rumania) recognition of its independence. The goal they share is membership of EU.

The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue has made considerable progress, mostly in the number of agreements signed; 80 percent of 30 agreements signed since 2013 have been implemented. As for the establishment of a community of Serbian municipalities – the Serbian side insists on the most – the issue was put on ice, along with the Brussels dialogue, once

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7 <https://www.danas.rs/politika/ekskluzivno-objavljujemo-integralni-tekst-plana-primene-sporazuma-o-normalizaciji-odnosa-beograda-i-pristine/>.

8 <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>.

presidents of Serbia and Kosovo, Aleksandar Vučić and Hashim Thaci, began negotiating border changes under-the-table. Talks about the community of Serbian municipalities started when Kosovo obtained a country phone code (383). According to Edita Tahiri, head of Kosovo's negotiating team at the time, the attempts at having border changes on the negotiating table actually blocked the talks about the community of municipalities, initiated at the US Embassy and attended by representatives of OSCE, Kosovo government, Serbian community and US diplomats.<sup>9</sup> Various incidents that broke out simultaneously such as a wall separating Mitrovica North and South, erected in the former served the same purpose.

In the meantime, the backdrop against which the dialogue was being conducted has changed. Having agreed to have the topic of border changes on the agenda EU Commissioner for Foreign Policy and Security Federica Mogherini actually changed the format of negotiations that eventually ended up at a blind alley. Mogherini's inability for managing such complex and delicate process within set criteria and standards was thus exposed.

## **2. Kosovo's partition undermines the concept of multiethnicity**

As it turned out, apart from the Brussels dialogue meant to be crowned with an agreement on Kosovo-Serbia normalization, Serbian and Albanian negotiators have been secretly negotiating modes for "a final, comprehensive, political agreement" through some other channels in international centers. In the article he penned for the Washington Post Karl Bildt says that newly partitions in the region are "recipes' for geopolitical instability. Serbian and Albanian political leaders have been discreetly exploring the possibility to settle their confronting interests through territorial exchanges. The idea about reconciliation through territorial exchanges has been circulating in Belgrade for years but it was only recently that it captured the attention of leading Albanian circles.<sup>10</sup>

9 Edita Tahiri, Vreme, November 22, 2018.

10 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/karl-bilt-ja-sam-protiv-podele-kosova-evo-i-zasto/5060es8>.

All promoters of this trend have emerged in the past couple of months – from the East-West Institute (New York)<sup>11</sup>, US ex-ambassador to Serbia Cameron Manter, Alex Soros Jr.<sup>12</sup>, Wolfgang Petrich to Ivan Vojvoda and Jelena Milić of the CEAS<sup>13</sup> at home, and many others. The term “correction of borders” is being frequently touched on. However, no one has ever explained what how things would be working in practice. As President Vučić’s time-tested supporter for resolution of the Kosovo issue, Austria organized a round table, which discussed changes of borders between Kosovo and Serbia. Like other EU member-states Germany opposes the very idea of changed borders. Officially, US has not said yes to it, saying just it would support any mutually acceptable agreement that would not destabilize the region.

As it turned out, however, the two sides interpret “corrections” quite differently; probably because each has been faced with domestic ill feeling and opposition to the very idea. And so, in public discourse the term “corrections” seems to imply exchange of territories: Kosovo North to be exchanged for South Serbia or the Presevo Valley.<sup>14</sup>

Aleksandar Vučić told the public that he stood for “demarcation with Albanians in Kosovo,” something that Belgrade has been advocating for long. “The policy I stand for is the one of demarcation with Albanians. Having a territory no one knows who is in charge of and to whom it actually belongs has always threatened with conflicts,” he said. “We should get as much as we possibly can, and lose the least we have to, that’s what we have been struggling for against all odds when it comes to Kosovo and Metohija.”<sup>15</sup>

This surely is neither just Vučić’s personal view nor that of his predecessor Boris Tadić, but a part of the state strategy the Serbian Academy

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11 Time for Action in the Western Balkans

12 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/opinion/northern-macedonia-rename-greece.html>.

13 Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies proposed Kosovo's partition at [https://www.ceas-serbia.org/images/2018/CEAS\\_Studija\\_Prica\\_sa\\_Zapadne\\_Strane.pdf](https://www.ceas-serbia.org/images/2018/CEAS_Studija_Prica_sa_Zapadne_Strane.pdf).

14 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/Kosovo-podela-granice-medjunarodna-zajednica/29422044.hotmail.Time.1>.

15 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/va%C5%A1ington-i-podela-kosova/29405225.html>.

of Arts and Sciences /SANU/<sup>16</sup> and writer Dobrica Ćosić formulated long ago.<sup>17</sup> Foreign Minister Dačić has always insisted on partition as the best solution, calling the latest suggestion “manifestation of the willingness for reaching a compromise for Kosovo that should not be seen as weakness.”<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, Belgrade-Pristina relations aggravated when Pristina decided to raise taxes on goods imported from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Analyst Ramush Tahiri argues that this decision was an enforced one and ineffective in the long run. “By making such decision the Kosovo government made it clear it was about a political decision meant to attract the attention to the problems plaguing the country and ensure a more equal standing within the Brussels dialogue.<sup>19</sup> For the first time the Kosovo government can take some action against Serbia and not worry about consequences because it was something it decided on its own as a proof that it has control over its entire territory,” says Tahiri. Kosovo authorities strongly criticize Serbia for its behavior at the international scene, mostly its campaigns against Kosovo’s independence and membership of international organizations (such as Interpol or UNESCO).

Analysts are far from being optimistic about the future of the Brussels dialogue; they agree that Belgrade-Pristina negotiations are

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16 <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/memorandum%20sanu.pdf>

17 Interview with Dobrica Ćosić, Večernje novosti, March 20, 2008. “To sum up: I have always seen a compromise between historical and ethnic rights as a solution to centuries long antagonism between Serbs and Albanians. Such compromise implies Albanians’ right to unification with their motherland, Albania, unification of the territories in where they are in majority. Territorial partition of Kosovo and Metohija, and demarkation between Serbs and Albanians should be realized without any aspirations for ethnically pure territories, and reciprocity of contents and forms of guaranteed national and civil rights of minority communities. Kosovo within Serbia, biologically sunk and demographically depressed, would turn it, in two decades, into a federation of two permanently antagonized nations. Life in such society would be painful, and progress slowed down...Serbian Middle-Age monasteries – Peć Patriarchate, Dečani, Bogorodica Ljeviška, Devič and Gračanica – should be given self-government by the model of Mt. Athos in Greece following restitution of the lands and woods nationalized in 1945. That would be a just and lasting solution and probably a cornerstone of cultural and overall Albanian-Serbian cooperation in economy, communication and other domains.

18 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-nemacka-rusija-eu/29426309.html>

19 [https://www.google.com/search?q=+https%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2F2FFcon9&rlz=1C1GGRV\\_enRS751RS751&oq=+https%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2F2FFcon9+&aqs=chrome..69i57.3556j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=+https%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2F2FFcon9&rlz=1C1GGRV_enRS751RS751&oq=+https%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2F2FFcon9+&aqs=chrome..69i57.3556j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

clinically dead. “Brussels dialogue is clinically dead. Praise be if it wasn’t since dialogue is the only way out of the crisis,” says journalist Milivoje Mihajlović, adding that EU is most to blame for the present situation because of its passivity while the dialogue was going on, and today’s encouragement to no matter what agreement just to “have a medal pinned on the mediator’s lapel to show that she had accomplished something.”<sup>20</sup>

### **3. Reactions from Kosovo and Serbia: critical from both sides**

The idea about border changes met with criticism in Serbia proper. Partition or demarcation leads not towards stability in the long run, says commentator Boško Jakšić<sup>21</sup>. Serbia’s former ambassador in Washington Ivan Vujačić says that the issue, as well as US attitude towards border changes, are being much speculated. He reminds that EU is at the wheel when it comes to negotiations, while US is important because of its influence on the Albanian side and Europeans have said long ago that territorial change was out of question.<sup>22</sup>

Vladimir Gligorov of the Vienna-seated International Economic Institute takes that a possible territorial barter (with Kosovo) would weaken Serbia, politically and in every other sense. In other words, he concludes, if the incumbent US administration supports territorial demarcation, it means that it is after undermining Serbia. “Because, any exchange of territories cannot but weaken Serbia in the Balkans, let alone its position in Europe and the world.”<sup>23</sup>

Demarcation along ethnic lines in Kosovo is not just a question of “protection” of Serbs, notably those in the North, but would have drastic repercussions, argues Skelzen Malici, commentator from Pristina. Some

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20 <https://kossev.info/mihajlovic-dijalog-mrtav-eu-sada-za-bilo-kakav-dogovor/>.

21 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-nemacka-rusija-eu/29426309.html>.

22 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/va%C5%A1ington-i-podela-kosova/29405225.html>.

23 Novi magazin 6. septembar 2018.

are of two minds about the issue, especially some politicians in the West, who see demarcation along ethnic lines as a speedier, more pragmatic and lasting solution given that Serbia has insisted on it ever since the 1990s when advocated by Dobrica Ćosić. Today, he says, the idea is being advocated in Kosovo as well, mostly by the main negotiator, the President. “When some Western diplomats say ‘we shall accept anything the two sides agree on’ they practically allow this possibility as well.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Professor Belul Becaj from Pristina, the issue of demarcation, correction or partition would annihilate everything accomplished through the dialogue, all agreements reached, including the one on the community of Serbian municipalities. However, he adds, the very idea about demarcation, correction or partition is by far less viable now than it was at the beginning.<sup>25</sup>

Civil society organizations (some 50) from Serbia and Kosovo addressed an open letter to EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, asking her to clearly stand against partition of Kosovo or territorial exchange along ethnic lines, the latter “having incited bloody conflicts in the region several times.” Ongoing hints of border changes as something possible are putting across a dangerous message not only to citizens of Kosovo and Serbia, but to the entire region as well, that the principle of ethnically owned territories could be legitimized. CSOs also emphasized in their letter that partition along ethnic lines would trigger off a chain reaction throughout the Balkans and open the floodgates to new conflicts.<sup>26</sup>

On many occasions the Serbian Orthodox Church /SPC/ has warned against any demarcation. “Recognition of the illegally proclaimed independence of Kosovo, persistently imposed on Serbia, would jeopardize the very survival of our Church and nation, and lead towards having Serbian holy places proclaimed Kosovo’s or Albanian cultural

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24 <https://www.danas.rs/politika/vucic-i-taci-glavni-protagonisti-etnickog-razgranjenja/>.

25 <https://kossev.info/scenario-razmena-teritorija-iseljavanja-stanovnistva/>.

26 [http://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/aktuelnosti\\_t320.html](http://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/aktuelnosti_t320.html).

monuments. This would equal ‘killing’ the memory of the Serbian people,” messaged the SPC Synod.<sup>27</sup>

No doubt that most critical of all was Sava Janjić, the abbot of the Visoki Dečani monastery. He kept warning that demarcations were “nothing but a hypocritical euphemism for Serbia’s partition along ethnic lines.” “Demarcation implies leaving some 80,000 Serbs under poor or uncertain protection, all for the purpose of some alleged integration into EU, which, according to well-informed sources, has never before been further from Serbia,” he says.<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. Serbian community in Kosovo vis-à-vis border changes: troubled and opposed**

*“Some three or four years ago everything settled eventually, and then turmoil started over this story about partition.”*

*(Zvečan)*

The partition idea disturbed Serbs and Albanians alike, though especially Serbs south of the Ibar River. Kosovo Serbs have not participated in any talks held up to now or have had a chance to have their say, let alone stand for their views. It should be noted that situations of Serbs in Kosovo North and those in Kosovo South are far from being the same given that any solution that implies border changes would leave Serbs in the south to purely Albanian rule. This dramatically jeopardizes their position – as they put it themselves – and in the long run guarantees a silent exodus.

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27 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:726592-Crkva-protiv-podele-Kosova>.

28 \$NIN, November 21, 2018.

Many statements by Belgrade's and Pristina's officials, and international representatives as well, about the so-called demarcation or border correction, plus the media campaigning for such solution, only worsened relations between Albanians and Serbs, and raised tensions on both sides. Abbot Sava Janjić warned that some kind of agreed on and "controlled" conflict was being prepared for early August 2018 when the Kosovo police would venture in Kosovo North, most probably on the occasion of proclamation of either autonomy or the community of municipalities beyond the ongoing Brussels dialogue. The Serbian side would react at such an action and victims would be inevitable. The Abbot warned that this scenario would be a rerun of the events in 2004. Belgrade-seated tabloids under the regime's control, he said, started their propaganda machinery back in July to prepare the terrain for the action, but KFOR stepped in and efficiently prevented tragic developments.<sup>29</sup>

The border change project threatens with destabilizing the entire region, said Rada Trajković of the European Movement in Kosovo, adding that any change of the kind would whet the appetite of a variety of groups resulting in tens and tens of years of instability.<sup>30</sup> "Life in Kosovo began stabilizing at long last, Serbs started renewing their relations with Albanians, schools admitting new students, the youth returning and settling down over here, and now they want to forcefully move us to Kosovo North just because they are after ethnically pure territories and partition. All this is so inhuman and repulsive, so insensitive that I am shocked."<sup>31</sup> In her view, presidents of Kosovo and Serbia, Thaci and Vučić are not after normal life for people. "They want us to hate one another, and they need to maintain instability just to stay in power and cover up their responsibility."<sup>32</sup> Quoting unofficial sources, she claims that Thaci

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29 <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1621565>.

30 <https://www.danas.rs/politika/trajkovic-priznanje-nezavisnosti-kosovu-ne-donosi-sustinski-nista/>

31 <http://www.novimagazin.rs/vesti/rada-trajkovic-taci-i-vui-zele-da-nas-dele-i-svadjaju>.

32 Ibid.

personally had tete-a-tetes with all mayors in South Serbia, as well as opposition leaders, and presented them the plans for border changes.<sup>33</sup>

Vučić's strategy is identical to the one Milošević had developed. "It was not by chance that he mentioned him (Milošević) while addressing Serbs in Kosovo North. According to this strategy, there would no longer be Serbs in Kosovo. After putting his signature on the Kumanovo Agreement Milošević ordered Nikola Šainović to withdraw all Serbs from Kosovo along with the army and the police. We, Serbs, who remained around our Church, paid this dearly. We were subjected to retaliation."<sup>34</sup>

Sava Janjić says, "Mogerini has not reacted as she should have, she began discussing a new format of talks. Presently both sides would not let go their phenomenal story about territorial exchange. They will be waiting for European elections in the hope something would change... All the trends indicate upcoming changes, but these changes will not be in the direction of extreme right as some take. Extreme rightist in Germany have not made any progress, but leftists, the Greens, have. Mogerini has discredited herself."<sup>35</sup>

General disposition and perception of the Serbian community also reflect Belgrade's decision to openly advocate border changes. The community sees the most influential exponent of Vučić's Serbian Progressive Party, the "Serbian List," as a party acting against their interests. According to citizens interviewed, this party cares little about real-life problems of ordinary people and thus practically make people, especially the young, to move out. It also cares not about implementation of Kosovo laws our interlocutors consider good ones.<sup>36</sup>

Almost all mayors are directly subordinate to the Serbian List, that is to President Vučić. In a letter to the latter, ten mayors of municipalities

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33 Ibid.

34 <http://www.novimagazin.rs/vesti/rada-trajkovic-vucieva-strategija-za-kosovo-identina-milosevivoj>.

35 .

36 Extract from an interview.

with Serbian majority population pledged their “loyalty and full support” to continued dialogue.<sup>37</sup>

Within the so-called inner dialogue Vučić had initiated, Kosovo Serbs said no to partition as it jeopardizes the Serbian community in the south, by far bigger than the one in the north (80,000 vs. 60,000 people in the north).<sup>38</sup> Although against Kosovo’s independence, the Serbian Orthodox Church /SPC/ is presently the only functioning institution in the south the Serbian community trusts. According to SPC, partition would not be a “civilized solution,” as Kosovo belongs to Albanians and Serbs alike. It takes that without KFOR Serbs would not survive, and that the situation will be normalized only once “war generations” are gone. This is what Albanians think too.<sup>39</sup>

*“Should the people have a say no partition would ever take place...It is no clear what it is presidents Vučić and Thaci have in mind when speaking about demarcation,”* say interviewees.<sup>40</sup>

When it comes to partition/demarcation, abbot Ilarion stressed out his strong opposition to any territorial exchanges or border shifts. His view is along the line of SPC’s official stance on the problem of Kosovo: no to partition, no to independence. In this context he also said, “Partition would result in exodus not only of the Serbian population but also of Albanian (in Kosovo North). This only shows how absurd the partition idea is. Whoever advocates this idea cares not about underlying hardship of ordinary people regardless of their religion or ethnic origin.”<sup>41</sup>

The people we talked to say the part Belgrade plays in the negotiating process is rather confusing so that no one can tell what it is one could expect in outcome. They take that the central government in Belgrade is not properly kept posted about the real state of affairs in the

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37 Quoted from the letter the Committee was presented with.

38 Given that Serbs did not participate in the 2011 census, all the figures are approximate, though within the quoted range.

39 Interview with Abbot Ilarion.

40 Extract from an interview.

41 Idem.

area, and in the entire territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Murder of Oliver Ivanović, one of outstanding Serbian politicians in Kosovo, staggered most people in the north, especially citizens of Mitrovica North. Ivanović had opposed partition and the Serbian community trusted him. Some interviewees claimed that was the motive behind his assassination.<sup>42</sup>

NGO “Aktiva” from Mitrovica North prognosticates that territorial exchange could cause political and constitutional crisis, result in abandonment of the idea about the community of Serbian municipalities, exodus, assimilation instead of integration, and a changed demographic structure.<sup>43</sup>

According to some analysts, Pristina got a strategic upper hand in latest developments by having a negotiating platform adopted by the parliament and forming a new negotiating team that met with Federica Mogherini on January 8, 2019 in Brussels. Kosovo authorities are now a step ahead of all other actors as they “outsmarted them, taking now one-sided measures and simultaneously building a quite new reality in which they are by far stronger than they used to be.”<sup>44</sup>

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42 Idem.

43 <https://kossev.info/scenario-razmena-teritorija-iseljavanja-stanovnistva/>.

44 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a450394/Janjic-Pristina-nadmudrila-ostale-kraj-sna-Mogherini-a-Beograd-mora-na-izbore.html>.

# II Serbian community in Kosovo

## 1. Divided into the one in the north (privileged) and in the south (neglected)

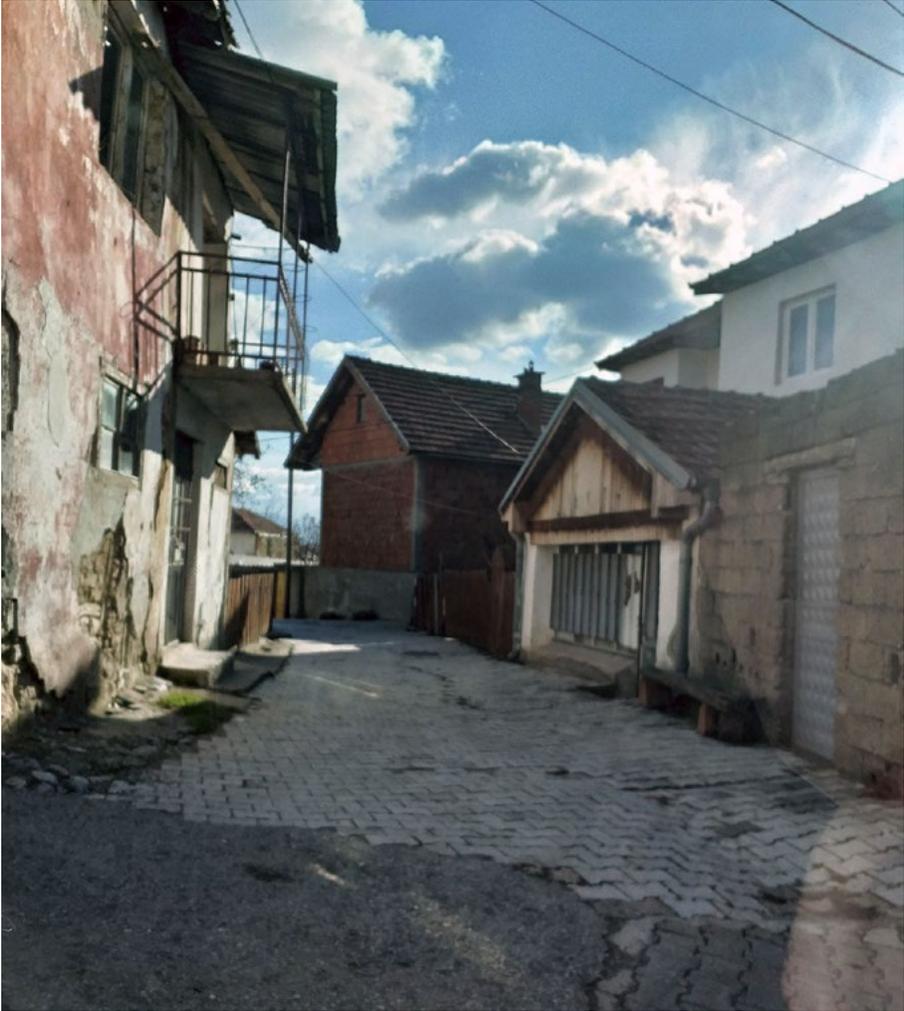
*It is hard to cope domination of the north. All the funds set aside for us have been rendered void. All grants are going to the north, nothing for the south. What we witness now is integration of the north and disintegration of the south. We feel like hostages to the south. And whenever we manage to accomplish something, we wake up next day wondering whether we shall be fired.*

*(Klokot)*

The situation of Kosovo North and its four municipalities hugely differs from the position the area south of the Ibar River has found itself in, not to mention the fact that Kosovo North borders with Serbia and majority of its population consider it a part of Serbia. Serbs south of the Ibar River also perceive Mitrovica North as a part of Serbia despite the fact that it is on the territory of Kosovo; they see it as such mostly because it is a seat of the majority of Serbian institution in Kosovo. For them, the main bridge over Ibar, in Mitrovica North, is the borderline between Serbia and Kosovo, rather than border crossing Jarinje.<sup>45</sup>

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45 Intervju Helsinškog odbora.



Orahovac

The Serbian community in the south feels that it is left to its own devices (especially after partition was announced as a possibility) and barely looks forward to the future. It also has the feeling that it is a hostage to the north (Mitrovica) and Belgrade. The Serbian List, under the control of Serbia's SNS and its leader, directly influences people's everyday lives, given that it has a firm grip on all jobs – either in education,

healthcare or administration. Possibilities for getting some other jobs are null.

Through the Serbian List Belgrade influences Kosovo institutions too, depending on how much it is interested in them. As a part of the ruling coalition in Kosovo, the Serbian List keeps supporting Ramush Haradinai's cabinet despite Belgrade-Pristina tensions. The Serbian List is most unpopular even in Kosovo North. Assassination of Oliver Ivanović just deepened people's distrust in it and especially in its newly elected president Milan Radoičić seen as key decision-maker in all matters concerning the Serbian community (and instructed by Belgrade). This was why some senior Serbian leaders in Kosovo reactivated their political engagement. Members of the Serbian List also began bearing a grudge about the manner in which the party communicates with Belgrade (getting straight orders).

In late 2017 the Serbian List managed to ensure Russia's support too. On the eve of local elections in Kosovo, its then leader Goran Rakić and Serbia's Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Marko Đurić met with leaders of Russia's ruling United Russia party. After the meeting Đurić's Office released that the United Russia supported the Serbian List's decision to participate in the Kosovo government.<sup>46</sup>

According to the Committee's interviewees, the Russian factor is not physically present in Mitrovica North or in other parts of Kosovo North; namely, it is being taken for granted that Kosovo Serbs should not worry about their future as long as Russia is major player at the international scene. Occasional humanitarian aid to people in enclaves south of the Ibar River is the only tangible proof of Russian assistance. Many take that Russia stands more for Kosovo Serbs than the Republic of Serbia proper.<sup>47</sup>

Complete legal vacuum in Kosovo North perfectly suits all forms of criminal activities certain interest groups in Serbia – and in Kosovo, too – make profit on. Once it came to power, the Serbian Progressive

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46 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srpska-beograd-cvrste-veze/29623575.html>.

47 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee.

Party, through the Serbian List, placed the entire Serbian community under its control. It managed to marginalize the Independent Liberal Party that had integrated into the Kosovo system back in 2009.

According to all interviewees, the Serbian List does not stand for the interests of the Serbian community in Kosovo but just follows orders from Belgrade the interests of which hugely differ from those of Kosovo Serbs. All the representatives of the Serbian List are concerned with, they say, are their own pockets and orders issued by Belgrade. Many underlined that in Kosovo institutions (the parliament, ministries and the public administration) the Serbian List did not bother itself with having the laws concerning the Serbian community implemented.<sup>48</sup>

In an interview with the NIN weekly, Rada Trajković, former MP in the parliament of Kosovo, claims that Serbs in Kosovo are more afraid of some Serbs than of Albanians. Milan Radoičić, vice-president of the Serbian List, is the one who decides who can and who cannot be nominated for the office of mayor, he has the final word about “all appointments under the jurisdiction of the Serbian government” and no one “has ever been appointed without his approval,” she says.<sup>49</sup>

Serbian institutions in the domains of education, healthcare, social protection, local self-government and public enterprises have not stopped functioning after the Brussels agreement was signed and integration formally declared.<sup>50</sup> Functioning of these institution in parallel with Kosovo institutions is among the biggest stumbling blocks in Serbian-Albanian relations. Kosovo authorities consider them illegal under the Kosovo law.

The biggest problem is that in administrative terms the Serbian community is still included in Serbia’s registries. Even after UNMIK began its mandate the Serbian community continued using Serbian documents. In 2000 UNMIK started issuing IDs and travel documents to all

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48 Idem.

49 NIN, December 2018.

50 Under the Brussels agreement Serbia was obliged to close down all parallel institutions in Kosovo as a major precondition for normalization of relations.

citizens of Kosovo. Those travel documents were not exactly passports given that they did not quote a person's nationality and were not issued by a sovereign state. Documents were available to everyone who submitted a proof of his or her residence in Kosovo in the Yugoslav era. Then in 2008, when Kosovo declared independence, UNMIK stopped issuing any documentation. In 2011 Kosovo and Serbia signed the agreement of free movement of people. Kosovo has been developing its system of registries since, registering people as citizens of Kosovo and issuing IDs. Situation in the municipalities with Serb-majority population is still problematic. Paragraph 2 of the above-mentioned agreement provides that "as soon as operatively possible both parties shall apply the ID system at border crossings for residents of the other side." Theoretically at least, all citizens of Kosovo can obtain three types of IDs – two issued by Serbia's administration and one by Kosovo's.

Kosovo recognizes documents issued by the Republic of Serbia; all citizens of Serbia who actually live in Serbia are entitled to them, meaning that Kosovo Serbs are not. However, citizens of Kosovo are entitled to Serbian documents if they have some property in Serbia and if they are registered in any municipality in Serbia. Many citizens of Kosovo (Serbs and Albanians alike) prefer Serbia's passports to Kosovo's documents due to the visa-free regime. Since 2009 Serbia has been issuing passports to Kosovo Serbs but their passports are not considered valid in the Schengen zone.

In 2015 Kosovo proclaimed passports and IDs issued in Serbia illegal on the territory of Kosovo. The ban was enforced in 2017; all documents needed for access to Serbian parallel institutions (healthcare and education) were confiscated. Since then only documents issued by the Directorate for Coordination and the police have been valid.

What further complicates citizens' lives is that Serbian parallel service providers (banks, post offices and public enterprises) would only accept documents issued by the Serbian police.

The Kosovo authorities cannot tell with certainty the number of Kosovo Serbs with residence registered in Kosovo. Under the Brussels

Agreement Serbia returned all Kosovo-based registries. Having compiled them, Kosovo established the main registry with special branches in Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić. Mitrovica has already had a registry office. In the meantime, many Serb in the north applied for Kosovo's documents so as to avoid troubles for not having them.

As of early September 2018 – and according to a decision of the Kosovo Ministry of the Interior – Serbs in the north and in other parts of Kosovo in possession of birth/death/marriage certificates issued by September 14, 2016 can register their citizenship status, marriage, birth or death of family members in Kosovo's central registry.<sup>51</sup>

Marriages, deaths or births the Kosovo administration would not recognize have been major obstacles for applying for Kosovo's IDs. However, in July 2018 Kosovo's Ministry of the Interior lifted this obstacle to those who have registered their marriages in the Serbian system by September 14, 2016.<sup>52</sup>

The same date is valid for all citizens who could not have deaths or births registered in Kosovo.

The Office of Ombudsman claims that the procedure is quite a simple one: all citizens need to submit are original certificates (birth, marriage or death) and copies of Kosovo's IDs.<sup>53</sup>

Serb are returning to Kosovo in minimal numbers. Interviewees explain this is the case because of the atmosphere Belgrade-seated media, unfamiliar with the actual situation, have been creating. Official Belgrade has been putting across messages about unsafe and risky return, thus discouraging people, especially those from enclaves in Southwest Kosovo (Peć, Orahovac, Velika Hoća, Gorazdevac, etc.). Generally, people live in fear because of the said propaganda. This seems to suit both sides, each wanting to solve its "national question," say interviewees.<sup>54</sup>

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51 <https://kossev.info/omoguceno-priznavanje-srpskih-brakova-i-registracija-rodjenja-i-smrti-uz-srpske-izvode-u-kosovskom-sistemu/>.

52 <https://kossev.info/omoguceno-priznavanje-srpskih-brakova-i-registracija-rodjenja-i-smrti-uz-srpske-izvode-u-kosovskom-sistemu/>.

53 Ibid.

54 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee. .

To all appearances, only return to Kosovo North and municipalities bordering Serbia is being encouraged for the purpose of ethnic consolidation of these regions. In Kosovo North, in Zvečan, the Serbian government has started constructing the so-called Sunny Valley meant to house some 1,500 Serbian returnees. In response, Kosovo's Ministry of Local Self-Government argued that only local self-governments were authorized to make decisions on building plans and permits for the "Sunny Valley" project.<sup>55</sup> Kosovo's Minister for Environment and Urban Planning Albena Reshitaj said that her Ministry had requested Zvečan-seated Urban Planning Department to submit all technical documentation about the said site.<sup>56</sup>

People's trust in Kosovo institutions is mounting at a snail's pace, the same as it used to about UNMIK. They trust KFOR the most, perceiving it as a warrant of stability. Serbian representatives in Kosovo institutions are not exactly regarded in high esteem; on the contrary, they are often seen as those standing in the way of Serbian interests in Kosovo.<sup>57</sup>

## **2. Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo: a major and influential factor**

The Serbian community perceives the Serbian Orthodox Church /SPC/ as "the only refugee people have" and today's "pillar of local community," although, as our interviewees put it, Serbs are not true believers in general and do not behave as such in everyday life. According to some, the Church should separate itself from politics, which is "not a place for it." The Church plays a major role in the community's social life.<sup>58</sup>

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55 <https://kossev.info/o-suncanaj-dolini-oglasila-se-dva-kosovska-ministarstva-parcijalne-i-razlicite-informacije/>.

56 <https://kossev.info/suncana-dolina-kosovsko-ministarstvo-tuzilo-sudu-opstinu-zvecan/>.

57 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

58 Idem.

The Dečani Monastery plays the most important role in the area south of the Ibar River. According to all interviewees, the Dečani fraternity is the strongest in Kosovo and has good relations with local community. The Church helps everyone in need. The Dečani Monastery frequently organizes excursions for local children, often their only experience of the “outside world.” Serbian children attend classes of religious training while those from other ethnic communities (Bosniaks) civil education classes.

The Monastery of Draganac in Kosovo Pomoravlje, say interviewees, is a model of church operation. Albanians, as well as foreigners, are often visiting it, the fact that the media should be exploiting more. Interviewees often reminded of abbot Ilarion’s frequent appeal – “We all need to live together.”<sup>59</sup>



Manastir Draganac

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59 Idem.

The Monastery Draganac has started the practice of organizing youth camps – an example to be followed by other temples. Youth of different religions from all over Kosovo have participated in these camps, which brought them closer together (especially young Serbs and Albanians) and, most importantly, contributed to mutual understanding and respect. The monastery would organize international youth camps in the period to come. The purpose of the project is to teach tolerance to the youth and get them know one another much better.<sup>60</sup>

Kosovo Serbs' concerns are not on the agenda of the Brussels dialogue and their (legitimate) representatives are not involved in any stage of negotiations. Some interviewees also stressed out the necessity for the SPC to participate in the negotiating process as a major and influential factor. Since Kosovo Serbs strongly trust it, the Church is discriminated by not being involved in negotiations – as some consultant body at very least.

Officially, the SPC is against partition. In his Christmas epistle (2019) Patriarch Irinej said that Kosovo Serbs were deprived even of the fundamental human right, the right to life in dignity, and that Serbian and other peoples would never be free in “the self-proclaimed fake state of Kosovo.” “Notorious taxes” on Serbian goods, “permanent threats, arrests, forming of the so-called Kosovo army meant to further intimidate and eventually expel all Serbs” only testify of it, wrote the Patriarch. “For the SPC the question of Kosovo and Metohija is a matter of our people’s survival, of the very existence of our priests, fraternities and, especially, our ancient holy places without which we would not have been what we are.”

“Building of a society based on the rule of law, in which people of different origin can live in peace, and where everyone’s religious, cultural and national identity are respected” is a major precondition to resolution of the Kosovo problem, concluded the Patriarch.<sup>61</sup>

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60 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee.

61 <http://mondo.rs/a1156957/Info/Srbija/Bozicna-poslanica-2019-patrijarh-Irinej.html>.

### 3. Socioeconomic problem: Brussels Agreement has not improved everyday life

All in all, the biggest problems plaguing the Serbian community are of socioeconomic nature: unemployment and no serious investments made either by the Albanian or Serbian side. Serbs with some capital would rather invest in Serbia. Mafia in the north has seized all profitable jobs in the south, which additionally burdens the freedom of the latter region.

It is to be noted, however, that international investment in Kosovo North began with signing of the Brussels Agreement. *“For fifteen years, not a single cent has been invested in the north, not a single infrastructural project implemented. We are so unkempt in infrastructural sense that we have just two-hour water supply daily. Sewers are 75 years old. And it is only now that they have begun working on it,”* said an interviewee.<sup>62</sup>

And yet, signing of the Brussels Agreement has not improved living conditions of the Serbian community. Citizens are not exactly informed about the significance of European institutions. Some interviewees stressed out, *“People have more urgent problems to cope with than advocacy for EU integration.”*<sup>63</sup>

Interviewees speak as one saying that Serbia should invest in economic development in the south, build factories and ensure jobs. However, Belgrade leaders often visit the south to promise this and that, but never keep their promises, and this is what frustrates local population that still hopes to stay in Kosovo, they say, adding that the Serbian community could not sustain without financial and economic assistance. Every investment in local economy would be well-spent, as it would empower the Serbian population for autonomous and sustainable functioning. Idleness of some mayors directly undermines the community’s interests. They all take that entrepreneurship has to be encouraged given that *“there is no life”* for them in Kosovo without financial stability.

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62 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

63 Idem.

Families also manage to keep ends meet with the assistance from those who have moved out. The gap between the employed and unemployed is deep. The unemployed receive 11,000 RSD social welfare (about 100 Euro) from Belgrade, but from Kosovo too. For instance, one-fourth of population in Ranilug live on welfare either from Belgrade or Pristina. There are also many people who do have jobs but are being paid just minimal wages.<sup>64</sup> Some such as engineers work for both municipalities at the same time, say interviewees. “People make no difference which municipality belongs to whom. They couldn’t care less.”<sup>65</sup>

A stratum of the privileged was created due to some people’s ties with ruling parties in Belgrade. Each of those individuals has several jobs at the same time – in public services and executive boards under Serbia’s control. Hence, some households earn 3-4 thousand Euros from such “sources” and, therefore, all they want is to maintain the status quo.

There is also a huge gap between Kosovo North and Kosovo South. Interviewees are of the view that the two parts should be leveled so as that the south could develop economically and get connected with the north. Generally, enclaves in the south do not communicate much with Serbs in the north. Kosovo Serbs badly need a new political elite, an unblemished one, that would genuinely stand for the interests of Serbs in the south. Such persons, say interviewees, should not come from Leposavić or Kosovska Mitrovica, since they cannot be sufficiently informed about local circumstances to be capable of standing for the interests of Serbs in the south. Besides, South Kosovo is not properly connected with the north: one of the biggest problems is non-existent public transport imperative to everyday functioning.<sup>66</sup>

Despite bigger benefits available to the north than to the south, a survey conducted by the Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER), as many as 46% of citizens in the north take that their living conditions are bad. According to findings of the survey, life is hardest

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64 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

65 Idem.

66 Idem.

in the municipality of Leposavić where 69% of interviewed citizens are dissatisfied with their living conditions. Unlike them, 76% of citizens of the Zubin Potok municipality is quite satisfied with their living conditions. The biggest problems the interviewed citizens point to are unemployment and water supply, security and political situation, high rate of crime, corruption, drug addiction and garbage disposal. As for infrastructure, they are most unsatisfied with the state of parking lots, the quality of water supply, bad sewing and roads; best ratings are given to telecommunications and postal services.<sup>67</sup>

People's lives mostly boil down to mere existence. There are cases of Serbs working for Albanian companies. Serbs did not have the opportunity to participate in the process of privatization in Kosovo. There is also the problem of "double taxes" for Serbian entrepreneurs: they are being taxed by both Kosovo and Serbia. Their business, therefore, can barely sustain for long. This is a huge obstacle to anyway poorly developed entrepreneurship at the time of generally very bad economic situation.<sup>68</sup>

Citizens participating in the said survey are most satisfied with functioning of pre-school institutions, and elementary and secondary schools, and least with judiciary and the policy. Generally, citizens of Zubin Potok manifested by far more satisfaction than those in other municipalities. They are especially satisfied with cultural and sports events held in their municipality.<sup>69</sup>

As for the structure of the employed, findings of the survey show that most people with full-time jobs work for public services (67%), which is much more than for private companies (29%).<sup>70</sup> This indicates dependency on Belgrade that pays for salaries in public services. As for amounts of wages, most of the employed (46%) are getting between 20,000 RSD (about 175 Euros) and 40,000 RSD (about 320 Eu-

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67 InTER survey, January 2019.

68 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

69 Idem.

70 Idem.

ros). Thirty percent of the employed are getting monthly salaries in the range 40,000-60,000 (500 Euros), while only 1% have salaries over 110,000 RSD (1,000 Euros). Nine percent of the employed receive less than 20,000 RSD monthly.<sup>71</sup> People working in the domains of health-care and education, and for municipal administrations are paid best.

A large number of pensioners from the Serbian community are deprived of their right to old age pensions because of blurred administrative rules and arbitrariness of municipal clerks. All citizens with Kosovo IDs when they turn 65, regardless of years of work, are entitled to basic, old age pensions amounting to 75 Euros per month. Kosovo's pension law provides in detail the documentation a citizen is bound to submit in order to exercise his/her right to the basic old age pension.<sup>72</sup> A lengthy list of documents to be submitted includes a paragraph calling for submission of "other possible proofs an officer of a relevant pension administration might ask for." Such terming opens the door to arbitrary decisions on the right to pension. Because of tons of complaints received, the Ombudsman is preparing *ex officio* a report on this specific article of the pension law.

"We shall ask the pension administration to precise the documentation officers are bound to ask from citizens. This cannot be left to one's arbitrariness. The paragraph is contradictory and blurred. Every law or administrative rule, or any act adopted by any ministry or government of Kosovo must be transparent and clear in order to be implemented. As things stand now, officers may ask for whatever occurs to them and have a reason why they deny people the right to their pensions," said legal adviser of the Ombudsman Office in Gračanica Aleksandra Dimitrijević.<sup>73</sup>

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71 *Idem.*

72 Kosovo pension law was enforced on June 20, 2014. In March 2016 the Kosovo government adopted a draft document on pension regulations, meaning amendments and supplements to the said law aimed at "creating better conditions for citizens of Kosvoo, annulment of pensions for those not living in Kosovo, and saving at least 10-12 million Euros in the budget," as then minister of labor and social protection Arben Abrashi put it.

73 <https://kossev.info/starosne-penzije-diskriminacija-kosovskih-srba/>.

Situation is especially problematic in the municipality of Klokot that has no pension administration office so that citizens must seek their rights in Vitina. So, it happened that an officer in the pension administration in Vitina asked 68-years-old Slavko Popović, refugee from Pristina and now a subtenant in Vitina, to submit a proof that his landlord was paying a tax on the rental.<sup>74</sup>

The municipality of Štrpce is among most developed municipalities in Kosovo. This is the only municipality people are not moving out from and the only municipality with Serbian majority population with all streets paved and equipped with lamp posts.<sup>75</sup> More and more citizens have started business of their own in this municipality known for the Brezovica ski center. About 11,000 Serbs and 3,000 Albanians live on the territory of this municipality.<sup>76</sup>

The said municipality is known for tourism for long. Before the war the Brezovica ski center on the Shar Mt. used to host best skiers from all over ex-Yugoslavia. After a couple of years of break, tourism became again the most important branch of economy. As of recently, people have been making their living on the famous Shar mountain cheese and blueberry farming, as well as hog farming. The latter business was started with the assistance from UNDP.

Apart from its own funds and governmental subsidies for farmers, stock breeders and small and medium enterprises, the municipality receives grants from international donor organizations. Presently, UNDP implements a major project, actually a follow-up of the “InTerDev 2” project financially assisted by the Austrian Agency for Development. This is among the most important projects that has already considerably upgraded the municipality’s agriculture, blueberry farming and small business.<sup>77</sup>

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74 <https://kossev.info/starosne-penzije-diskriminacija-kosovskih-srba/>.

75 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

76 <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/opstina-strpce-jedna-od-najuspesnijih-lokalnih-samoupravana-kosovu/4192589.html>

77 <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/opstina-strpce-jedna-od-najuspesnijih-lokalnih-samoupravana-kosovu/4192589.html>.

About 1,000 stayed in the municipality of Orahovac (350-400 live uptown and the rest in neighboring village of Velika Hoča). They live in isolation, their economic and financial potential is very limited, and mostly depend on humanitarian aid since, apart from those working for a school, local medical center and municipality, they have no earnings at all. Economy is mostly based on agriculture, vineries and vine production. The area is known for its high-quality vines. However, the Serbs engaged in this business lack possibilities for making profit on it or modernizing production. Only assistance provided to vine production and vineyards can ensure sustainable life in the community.

Out of all Serbian-majority population municipalities, the municipality of Klokot has the highest emigration rate. People are mostly emigrating because of constant political conflict that affects their everyday lives. Klokot is the only municipality in which the Serbian List lost local elections, which were won by an authentic civilian movement. However, under the pressure from Belgrade and the Serbian List the winner became a turncoat. Sales of Serbian property (with a helping hand from a former mayor) brought in scores of Albanian settlers, which not only changed the demography of the area but also negatively affected economic situation of the municipality. The municipality is known by high-quality cabbage, potatoes and paprika. People from all over Kosovo are buying agricultural products in Klokot.

The Serbian government decided (in October 2018) to donate some 300 million RSD to some 76 projects worth 6.1 billion RSD. In the amount of 300 million RSD. Marko Đurić, director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, quoted some of them including reconstruction of the Clinical Center in Mitrovica, construction of a hospital in Gračanica and an institute for forensic medicine, reconstruction of the Faculty of Technical Sciences, a new building to house the Mitrovica University, and a battery factory in Zvečan, a potato processing factory in Pomoravlje, etc.

## 4. Situation of the youth: no social life and prospects for them

*Whoever wants to play on Serbhood should better stay at home. Young people must communicate (an entrepreneur from Mitrovica North)*



Severna Mitrovica

As they have no prospects for getting jobs young people usually leave Kosovo and go to Serbia or even further (Malta, Russia, etc.). A young interviewee said, “The only labor market here is the one available through political parties.”<sup>78</sup> Young Serbs in enclaves would rather stay in Kosovo should they have a chance for employment, which is presently null. So, they plan well in advance where to go and go on with their lives

78 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

outside Kosovo. All interviewees insisted on depolitization; for, they explain, it is policy that defines lives all Serbs be they or not supporters of the Serbian List.

Some 50-60 young Serbs from each generation leave Kosovo.<sup>79</sup> This only further undermines the community. The only social life available to young people are coffee shops where they communicate via social networks, watch together TV NI (the station's signal was switched off for the area south of the Ibar River) and are pretty well informed about developments in Serbia and the region. The problem of passports (that are issued by the Coordination Body) makes West European labor market barely available to them. Therefore, they are opting for other destinations.

It is also hard for young Kosovo Serbs to find jobs in bigger towns with Albanian-majority population the more so since high unemployment rate pesters younger Albanians as well. In this context, all the youth in Kosovo, regardless of their ethnic origin, are facing the same problem.<sup>80</sup> This is why all the youth rarely leave their hometowns and go visiting other place.

Some areas, especially those with bigger concentration of the Serbian population, do have potential for development (Kosovsko pomoravlje, Štrpce Velika Hoča, Orahovac) but the overall social, political and economic climate makes young people migrate in masses. They are even offered assistance (such as grants) by Kosovo's ministries (of finances and economy) but calls for application are written in Albanian (occasionally in English), which poses a problem for those youth who might want to apply.<sup>81</sup>

Many interviewees said the absence of prospects for prosperity lead to depression, alcoholism and violent behavior. The youth would like to do nothing and be rich. Some municipalities are coping with problems of gambling, drug abuse and prostitution. This is being hushed

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79 Idem.

80 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee.

81 Idem.

up, say interviewees, since people are aware how grave these problems are.<sup>82</sup>

Generally speaking, young Serbs and their elders differently perceive policies in Kosovo (and in Serbia too); the youth are more objective in appraising information the media are spreading. Patriarchal values are deep-rooted and passed from a generation to generation: young people do not leave their home and live with their parents for long time. Those who decide to live on their own depart from patriarchalism in almost no time.<sup>83</sup>

Elder generations are more prone to media manipulation, especially Belgrade-seated media. Interviewees take that a community of Serbian municipalities would be of no avail to Kosovo Serbs since it could not fundamentally change the present (bad) situation for better.<sup>84</sup>

Many interviewees say that “younger generations see a bigger picture and are more liberal than older ones;” young ones are those who might head some progress in Kosovo, they argue, but only if they free themselves from the pressure from older politicians and local leaders who have been actually governing people’s lives in Serbia and Kosovo for much too long.<sup>85</sup>

Because of language gap young Serbs and Albanians barely communicate. Our interviewees suggested the Faculty of Philology in Kosovska Mitrovica should renew studies of Balkanology with courses in Albanian language, while the University in Pristina should do the same about B/C/S language. This is the only way for the Serbian language to sustain in Kosovo as one of official languages. Otherwise it could lose the status of an official language.

Social life, including sports events, mostly depends on politicians’ good will. If someone is eager to be more active in local social life but is not seen as “politically suitable” he or she will run into closed doors.

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82 Idem.

83 Idem.

84 Idem.

85 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

“Everything that goes on at local level is with a political background, no exceptions here.” It is notably easy for politicians to control smaller communities and turn local population into “voting machines.” This is what further motivates young people to move away. They might only decide to stay in the conditions of depoliticized communities and if free to make their own decisions.<sup>86</sup>

Authentic, local political initiatives standing against the deep-rooted distribution of power in local communities are usually thwarted given that Belgrade support local political leaders (financially and logistically), say interviewees.<sup>87</sup>

Because of irregular public transport and poor finances travel to bigger communities such as Gračanica or Kosovska Mitrovica poses a big problem to the young. Their communication with the outside world usually boils down to internet. Except for the youth studying in Kosovska Mitrovica one can barely run into anyone young in smaller villages; local youth come home only for vacations.<sup>88</sup>

## **5. Education for the youth: separate educational programs**

Elementary education is available to children in all municipalities and settlements with the Serbian-majority population. Although differently equipped all the schools have at least basic teaching tools. The same refers to teaching staffs that are on Serbia’s pay list. Though financed from the same budget, salaries paid to them are some 142 percent higher than those their colleagues in Serbia receive monthly.<sup>89</sup>

However, as some interviewees put it, children are generally disinterested in extra-curriculum activities, which incapacitates them

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86 Idem.

87 Idem.

88 Ibid.

89 Intervju Helsinškog odbora

when they continue their schooling in Serbia; they have not been thoroughly educated in their local schools, especially in smaller places such as Prekovce.<sup>90</sup>

The case of a “partitioned” school in the village of Jasenovik (Novo Brdo) cannot but attract notice. Namely, either in mornings or afternoons, separate classes by Serbia’s or Kosovo’s curricula are being for Serbian and Albanian children. The two groups do not socialize by their own free will but have to cooperate in occasional project focused on multiethnicity. Language is the biggest obstacle to their communication. When they do communicate, which is something have to do in project implementation, they use English. Once such projects are over their socializing is over as well. Young Serbs and Albanians would surely make friends should there be some premise wherein they could come together and speak to one another, say interviewees.<sup>91</sup>

Children are fewer in fewer in smaller towns and villages. In Goraždevac, for example, less and less children apply for local secondary. The problem is, says the former principal of the school in Goraždevac, that the secondary school class for the first year has been closed down (there had been just one student) so that now children are applying to secondary schools outside the town, and opt for curricula that ensures them more lucrative jobs (such as dental assistants). The principal of the town’s elementary school says that students earn for socializing with other children regardless of their ethnic origin given that at their age they care little about ethnicities.<sup>92</sup>

Since the Liberal Democratic League has won local elections in Peć the attitude towards the Serbian community changed for the better. For instance, the Mayor of Peć regularly visits Goraždevac and talks with local people, a practice our interviewees called a model of good practice.<sup>93</sup>

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90 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee.

91 Idem.

92 Idem.

93 Idem.

Although restricted, the funds for educational infrastructure the Serbian community receives from Belgrade are nevertheless higher than anything Pristina could afford, say interviewees. Teaching staffs would not want to teach by curricula Pristina would finance and define. Such programs, they say, would be bad for children and aimed against the Serbian community in Kosovo.<sup>94</sup>

Interviewed students said they would gladly participate in seminars together with their Albanian peers but saw no sense in a merge of two educational program that are so different. According to them, the Serbian one is much better and with longer tradition than the Albanian.<sup>95</sup>

Because of local population's modest incomes, excursions organized for children usually last two or three days, restricted to visit to place in Central Serbia. Excursions stand for rare opportunities for children to step out of their enclaves.

Ever since the Kosovo government decided have diplomas issued in Serbia and in Kosovo leveled up, the process of verification of Serbian diplomas has been underway. Aleksandar Arsić of the European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) in charge of diploma verification says that up to now they have received 1,315 requests for assertion of authenticity which was confirmed in 1,274 cases.<sup>96</sup>

Serbs in the north are usually schooled in Mitrovica North (secondary schools and university), perceived as a pillar of the Serbian community. However, said interviewees, more and more young people south of the Ibar River are being schooled in Serbia. The Pristina University, dislocated to Mitrovica, is financed by the Republic of Serbia. And yet, young people graduating from the University in Mitrovica have trouble to get jobs. Professors teaching them are visiting professors, mostly coming from Central Serbia. Although situated on the territory of Kosovo the University does not cooperate with the Pristina-based University that functions by Kosovo's educational system. The International University

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94 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

95 Idem.

96 ECMI annual report, 2018.

IBCM – with branches in both parts of Mitrovica – is considered as good model of meeting place for Albanians and Serbs, and students of other ethnic origins. Graduates from this international college continue to communicate as business partners and counterparts.

Cooperation with faculties in Central Serbia is most developed. However, politics considerably influence possible cooperation between Kosovo-based universities despite the fact that academic communities of both sides are interested in exchanges, say interviewees.

## **6. Healthcare: medical services provided mostly within ethnic communities**

People from the Serbian community, in the north and south alike, are provided healthcare within Serbia's system. The biggest medical center is seated in Kosovska Mitrovica and provides services to all Kosovo Serbs, except for in serious cases when patients are transported to Niš, Kraljevo, Novi Pazar or Belgrade.

Speaking about the situation in the partitioned Mitrovica, an interviewee emphasized that most requests for specialist examinations or more simple medical interventions were being answered by ethnic principle. Medical services are usually provided within ethnic communities. However, patients trust their doctors regardless of ethnic origin. According to interviewees, it would be most welcome for practitioners from both parts of the divided town to cooperate; they suggest some seminars to be organized with this aim. This is especially important given that in a partitioned town such as Mitrovica having patients transported either to Belgrade or Pristina is not always a logistically rational solution.<sup>97</sup>

In urgencies Kosovo Serbs turn to Albanian doctors, the same as Albanians do the other way around. Medical services provided in Serbia are by far better than in Kosovo, which is why patients with serious health conditions are usually sent to Serbian medical centers.

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97 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

Medical practitioners from both parts of Mitrovica do communicate informally, especially those of older generations who used to work “under the same roof.” Younger doctors do not feel so free to communicate and then they do, they usually communicate in English. Most doctors in Kosovo North who work for Serbia’s medical system opposed integration into the Kosovo healthcare, mostly because of its bad state.<sup>98</sup>

Professional cooperation between medical officers of different ethnic origin is not problematic by itself; the problem is in institutional inconsistency resulting from once unique and then partitioned healthcare – one under Belgrade’s and the other under Pristina’s control.<sup>99</sup>

Belgrade had set aside 4 million Euros for construction of a hospital in Gračanica. Although even Pristina had done the same for the purpose, the project has never been realized and the moneys ended up in individual pockets. Many interviewees agree the project, had it been realized, would have considerably promoted Gračanica as a medical center providing services to Serbs south of the Ibar. A new hospital would have also provided new jobs, and Albanians would have also been only glad to have it since they have confidence in Serbian doctors. Albanians are still going to Belgrade for treatments.

Each municipality has an out-patient ward and a pharmacy, and there are some medical officers in every. Wards and pharmacies are included into Serbia’s healthcare system, and their staffs receive salaries from Serbia. Their monthly salaries are higher than those paid to their colleagues in Serbia proper. Pharmacies are poorly supplied (and were such even before Kosovo imposed taxes on Serbian goods). Therefore, people usually have to turn to private pharmacies that are mostly owned by Albanians.

Of all pharmacies operating within Serbia’s healthcare system only the one in Gnjilan (seated in Prekovic) is not indebted and is sustainable. Serbian Ministry of Healthcare’s decision on centralization of pharmacies on the territory of Kosovo, with a seat in Kosovska Mitrovica,

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98 Idem.

99 Idem.

will impair distribution of medicaments, as well as the existing organizational arrangements. The problem is also in the fact that some pharmacies that exist on paper only are still on Serbia's official pay list.<sup>100</sup>

Bureaucratic procedures for supply of medicaments (frequent blockades at border crossings) are so complex that pharmacies procure drugs only twice a year. The result is that supplies barely satisfy demands.<sup>101</sup> Belgrade also pressurizes pharmacists in enclaves against cooperation with Kosovo institutions. "We used to procure medicaments from Kosovo institutions. And then a new doctor showed up and said, 'This can be the case no more.' And now we are getting medicaments from Serbia only twice a year," said an interviewee.<sup>102</sup>

The main center of family medicine in Novo Brdo that functions within Kosovo's healthcare system employs Albanians, Serbs and medical officers from other ethnic communities from the area. Members of all ethnicities in the area turn to it. According to our interviewee, interpersonal relations are very good and patients are satisfied with services provided to them no matter how restricted they are because of the situation of Kosovo's healthcare.<sup>103</sup> The fact that no law on healthcare fund has been passed in Kosovo up to now (planned for 2019) is among main reasons why the Serbian community opposes integration into Kosovo's healthcare system. Serbs are presently anxious about being denied some medical services in the case of integration.

Besides, many medical officers fear losing their jobs should the two systems integrate. "Less people will be employed if we are integrated into their healthcare system. They need six medical officers in Novo Brdo, while we 20 full-time employees at present," said an interviewee.<sup>104</sup>

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100 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

101 Idem.

102 Idem.

103 Intervju helsinškog odbora.

104 Intervju Helsinškog odbora.

## 7. Culture: mostly boiled down to folklore

Kosovo's cultural scene is divided by ethnic lines despite the obvious need for cultural contents that would bring different ethnic communities together. NGO Art Polis is one of rare organizations connecting Serbian and Albanian artists in Kosovo.

Financially limited, cultural life of the Serbian community mostly boils down to folkloric events. The University in Kosovska Mitrovica has the potential necessary for upgrading culture and arts, which by itself cannot motivate people's stay in Kosovo. Alternative cultural scene is being developed gradually in Mitrovica North. At present there are two venues of artistic expression: Bes(i)smisao and Aquarius.

Aleksandar Duđerin, who came from Novi Sad and now lives and works in Mitrovica, says, "Mitrovica stands for an urban seat of the Serbian culture...Here we have more than 10,000 students. None of them wishing to stay here would be unimaginable. They just have to see prospects for getting jobs."<sup>105</sup> "People working for cultural and educational institutions here and receive huge salaries from Belgrade should start living here as well instead of visiting their work places couple of times a month. By actually living here they would upgrade culture. Mitrovica offers all conditions necessary for it, but the problem is that people want to have big salaries but do not want to live here too," he adds.<sup>106</sup>

According to Miljana Duđerin, not much progress has been made when it comes to quality culture and arts. "The reason why this is so is that governmental institutions have no ear for 'high' arts. Without any valid arguments – and not even trying to provide them – the state turns down quality artistic programs. It simply picks up and implements some project emanating no creative energy," she says.<sup>107</sup>

Cultural centers function in the south, especially the ones in Gračanica and Štrpci. Generally speaking, because of limited funds

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105 <https://kossev.info/ne-daju-da-umetnost-napusti-kosovsku-mitrovicu/>.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

cultural life is not exactly dynamic. Communication with Albanians is restricted, though not burdened with some serious problems.

Serbian and Albanian NGO, especially those focused on culture, often cooperate in Štrpci. They have organized several courses in Albanian and Serbian languages. Citizens display interest for cultural events that are being organized almost on daily basis in Štrpci. According to interviewees, the National Theatre in Gračanica has a better repertoire but Štrpci is now trying hard to outstrip it. Insufficient communication and poor contacts with Mitrovica render mutual cooperation in culture rather hard. The local cultural center houses a library with over 25,000 titles in its catalog. Cooperation with cultural institutions in Pristina is smooth.

Local communities, especially local youth, are trying to animate cultural life. In Ranilug, for instance, local cultural center has been renovated. The latter could be labeled an almost heroic attainment considering highly limited funds allocated to culture in general. Two manifestations are being staged in Ranilug each year. One is held in May when the town hosts sportsmen and cultural-artistic societies from Kosovo and Serbia. Another, called St. Vitus Games, takes place in late June and also assembles cultural-artistic societies, young artists and intellectuals from all over Kosovo.<sup>108</sup>

## **8. Property and cadaster: unsettled problems of ownership**

Serbia has not yet returned castral records to Kosovo despite the fact that the Brussels Agreement bounds it to hand over documentation for the year 2011.

People are complaining about difficulties they run into when they want to have usurped property restored to them – the procedure

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108 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

either takes much too long or implies persistent efforts to accomplish anything.

“Should a state commission for public records of property be formed it’s even hard to imagine what would emerge: many directors have sold public property as their own, thus renouncing the state’s claim to it. Therefore, forming a cadaster is on a priority list,” says Rada Trajković. As for the usurped Serbian property, she takes that Serbs do not insist on restoration but do expect to be compensated either by the state of Kosovo or usurpers. Compensation should also be placed on the negotiating agenda because Serbs could be left without lands Albanians have been using for almost twenty years. This is why the rule of law guaranteeing inviolability of property is so important.<sup>109</sup>

Problems with usurped property are many. Even when a court of law decides that some property has to be restored, its judgment is not being respected at local level. Everything depends on a party in power in certain municipalities.

In early 1990s Milorad Đoković from Vitomirice near Peć got a lot from the municipality and built a house on it. He had to leave it in 1999. When he came back, he found his home occupied. “The municipality of Peć decided that the property should be restored to him and a relevant department was expected to start the procedure. However, this decision turned out to be in vain. Although the Ministry for Local Self-government suggested that the property should be booked in his name, the municipality is still stalling realization. Chair of the local parliament in Peć Dr. Islam Husai promised to deal with the problem in the period to come.<sup>110</sup>

In March 2018 the Kosovo parliament passed the Law on Property Taxation. The said law provides that citizens whose property was usurped shall not be taxed for the period of usurpation, say representatives of the Serbian List.<sup>111</sup>

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109 <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1588829>.

110 Radio Goraždevac, 2018.

111 Idem.

The property problem is still unsolved in many cases. Cadastral records have been allegedly handed over to Kosovo. Nevertheless, many cases of usurpation remained unsolved because of unavailable records. Both sides (Serbian and Albanian) have a hand in this considering all under-the-counter dealings that have taken place in the meantime.

## **9. Security: Policemen leaving Kosovo Security Forces under the pressure (from Belgrade)**

The Serbian community would have felt much safer should tensions between politicians in Belgrade and Pristina lessen. In this context, the role of the media is quite adverse, as they keep stirring interethnic hostility, say interviewees.<sup>112</sup>

Most interviewees said they were more afraid of Serbs in the north than Albanians. Out of fear they even refuse to comment on media stories about mafia in the north. In the ranks of the Serbian community the issue of security has turned “internal:” in the aftermath of the war they were afraid of Albanians, but what concerns them nowadays is the feeling of uneasiness within the (Serbian) community.<sup>113</sup>

Kosovo Serbs generally oppose Kosovo’s membership of Interpol because that would face them with new lists of Serbs wanted by the police. Aware of the narrative Belgrade has imposed on them, they are reluctant to speak about the past. They are mostly against forming of the Kosovo army but take the hue and cry Belgrade is raising about it exaggerated, the more so since such an army has been a reality for long.

The first event within a campaign for vacancies available to Serbian policemen who resigned in mid-2018 announced by Minister of the Kosovo Security Forces /KBS/ Rustem Berisha was organized in Čaglavica. The event – actually a round table organized by the Institute

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112 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

113 Idem.

for Affirmation of Interethnic Relations – was meant to dissuade young Serbs that KBS posed a threat, and convince them to join the force. The campaign was launched because 60 out of 130 Serbian policemen have walked out on KBS since the beginning of 2018.

Such mass resignation is seen as an outcome of Belgrade's pressure, blackmail and threats. Findings of a survey conducted by the Institute for Affirmation of Interethnic Relations show that "gangs in the north" were those that influenced most Serb policemen to leave KBS.<sup>114</sup>

*"Two jobless workers applied for KBS. Serbia then offered them 40 thousand dinars each to withdraw their applications. Sixty men from Kusa applied and refused to withdraw. Salary in the army amounts to 430 Euros. Novices are even sent to courses of extra training. Belgrade keeps confusing us,"* said an interviewee.<sup>115</sup>

In October 2018 Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić appealed to Kosovo Serbs not to join KBS – formally, not yet an army – unlike the Kosovo police into which Serbia proper had integrated several hundreds of its former policemen.

"Once again I appeal to Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija not to be part of it. I openly appeal to them not to participate in formation of a Kosovo army, because they are forming such an army just to make Serbs shoot other Serbs one fine day. I appeal to Serbs to assist them in no way is such double-dealing activity, dirty business of trampling their own (Albanian) Constitution underfoot – which means nothing to us and which we recognize not – just because they have found some roundabout formula for making things seem legal...Of course, some Serbs would not listen to my appeal. But as far as I see such people are fewer and fewer. Many thanks to people, many thanks to Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija who understood this message of the state of Serbia."<sup>116</sup>

Although the Army of Serbia will be by far stronger than the army of Kosovo to be, Kosovo Serbs see formation of the latter as preparations

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114 <https://kossev.info/oko-300-srba-se-prijavilo-da-budu-clanovi-kbs/>.

115 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

116 Ibid.

for ethnically based violence by the state they recognize and want not, and under the auspices of the international community, above all KFOR, which officially stands for the only legal armed force in Kosovo. Decreased KFOR troops following on the establishment of the Kosovo army and gradual transfer of duties to it would also add to their anxieties. Serbia's political leadership and all the media in Serbia fuel such perception.

The decision of formation of the Kosovo army is mostly of symbolic significance, as yet another proof that Kosovo is irrevocably lost to Serbia, the more so since its army is far from being a military threat to Serbia. What bothers Serbia is Kosovo's almost certain membership of NATO, which would shrink its maneuvering ground. This is also why Russia opposes formation of the Kosovo army the troops of which would not exceed 5,000, which approximates the number of KFOR troops (7,000).

Serbia's media are listing other reasons for anxiety too: for instance, such an army (it's only a matter of time when, they argue) will try to expel the Serbian population from the north.

## **10. Discrimination: in institutions and everyday life**

Many interviewees appraised interethnic relations as correct. No gross physical assaults committed by Albanians have been registered over past couple of years. However, Kosovo Serbs are being discriminated against in institutions and everyday life. That's one of the reasons why young people leave Kosovo.

Sometimes people are being discriminated against because of the language they use, say interviewees. Officially, Serbian and Albanian are equal, and the state of Kosovo is bound to use Serbian language in communication with the Serbian community and have all laws translated into Serbian. However, the quality of translations is a matter of

frequent complains – such translations make law sound senseless and miss their sum and substance.<sup>117</sup>

Generally, the language barrier is a crucial problem of communication between ethnic communities in Kosovo, especially between Serbian and Albanian. And yet, the language barrier does not stand in the way of trade between the two communities.

Albanian policemen punish Serbs with irrationally high traffic fines. This is the case in all enclaves. According to interviewees, this practice is a perfect example of indirect pressure on local Serbian population, and hinders normal functioning of everyday life.<sup>118</sup>

Incidents are most frequent in Southeast Kosovo where Albanians suffered most in 1998-99 (Orahovac, Velika Hoča, Đakovića, Peć) and wherefrom the biggest number of Serbs moved out. The biggest number of missing Serbs (78) was also registered in this area.

A memorial to missing and abducted Serbs was erected at the entrance to Velika Hoča. Serbia's flag posted in the vicinity of it was taken away. On six occasions have unknown perpetrators taken away a plague to missing reporters of the Radio Pristina Đuro Slavuj and Ranko Perinić, posted on the road leading towards the neighboring village of Zočište.<sup>119</sup>

Interviewed citizens in Orahovac also say that “parading” of Kosovo's ROSU special forces through Serbian villages at the time of the vote for Kosovo's membership of Interpol was meant to exert pressure on population. Not long ago, a flag of the Serbian Orthodox Church was put on fire inside the local church.<sup>120</sup>

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117 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

118 Idem.

119 [https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2018&mm=03&dd=04&nav\\_category=640&nav\\_id=1365473](https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2018&mm=03&dd=04&nav_category=640&nav_id=1365473).

120 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

## **11. Civil sector: contacts and communication between Serbian and Albanian activists establishes**

Kosovo's civil sector has grown, especially in the Serbian community, thanks to the assistance from the international community. The government of Kosovo financially assists NGOs in Serbian-majority communities though with rather modest grants of up to 10,000 Euros. Serbia finances only the organizations registered within its system, mostly cultural societies. The civil sector in the south that used to be pretty active until a couple of years ago is in the back seat now – the biggest part of grants from abroad go to the north today.

The international community assists project of multiethnic character, which nowadays stands for the mode the two sides can use for communication and cooperation. This mostly refers to educational program strengthening communication among children. And yet, children from the two ethnic communities socialize just as long as such programs last.

The NGO sector also works on programs strengthening communication with young Albanians. Such opportunities for the young (Serbs) are scarce indeed considering the patriarchal society they live in. But, regardless of all obstacles, more and more young people go to the communities with Albanian-majority population; gradually they manage to overcome stereotypes about the “other side.” “Face to face” contacts between young people, say interviewees, is the best remedy against deep-rooted stereotypes and barriers between young Albanians and Serbs. Informal contacts are crucial to reconciliation.<sup>121</sup>

NGOs in the north and south alike generally deal with the rights of the Serbian community and Serbs integration into Kosovo institutions. Some are more focused on culture (that is, the safeguard of Serbian heritage in Kosovo), women's rights, economic development and

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121 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

entrepreneurship, and journalism. Basically, NGOs in the north and south do not differ much one from another in terms of topics in focuses of their activity, although those in the south are somewhat more concerned with interethnic relations.

Kosovo NGOs are operating in about the same conditions as their counterparts in most other countries emerging from Yugoslavia. This particularly refers to challenges they have to cope with such as bad interethnic relations, dire economic situation, societies without strong democratic values, etc. NGOs mostly cooperate smoothly with international actors that are, as it is, their biggest donors

Political pressure to which NGOs are exposed at local level affects their cooperation with local self-government. The latter depends on the extent to which they are ready for compromise and restrain themselves from criticizing Serbian political representatives in Kosovo. Kosovo's NGO sector has not yet earned as much trust of the society it would like to. They are mostly seen as organizations more concerned with interests of foreign countries than those of local communities, and not much interested in real-life problems of local population.

The Women's Network of Kosovo assembles 134 Albanian organizations and is most active. Some Serbian NGOs dealing with women's rights are included in the network and stand for a major channel of interethnic cooperation.

It is in Serbian-majority communities that the Regional Women's Lobby RWL<sup>122</sup> (assembling NGOs and women politicians from the Western Balkans) is most active. Serbian women's NGOs taking part in RLW activities include Moravski biser (Parteš), NGO "Avenija" (Gračanica), "Ruka+Ruci"(Ugljare), NGO "Putevima Sunca," NGO "Komitet žena" (Čaglavica), NGO "Djurdjevdan (Preoće), Forum žena (Ranilug) , NGO

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122 Regional Women's Lobby for Peace in Southeastern Europe networks women leaders, politicians and NGO activists from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. RWL advocate empowerment of women and gender equality in politics and all activities in the region. It aims at strengthening the role of women in democratization, regional reconciliation, and advocates lasting peace to be ensured through European integration of the region.

“Nada” (Ranilug), NGO “Tvoj glas” (Novo Brdo), NGO “W&W Novo Brdo” (Novo Brdo), NGO “Naš dom” (Novo Brdo), NGO “Ikebana” (Štrpce) NGO “Munadesia”, NGO “Žensko pravo” (Mitrovica North), NGO “WBA” (Severna Mitrovica), NGO “MWAHR” (Mitrovica North), Svet Andjela (Mitrovica North), NGO “Dona” (Štrpce), NGO Fame Space (Štrpce), NGO “Kolo srpskih sestara” (Zubin Potok) and many informal groups.

## **12. Influence of the 1990s wars on interethnic relations: imposed narrative shaped by Belgrade**

*We cooperate with Albanians and then some politician's statement, from this side or another, pops up and disturbs everything.*

Serbian Albanian relations are burdened with many stereotypes and layers from the past that hamper communication and normalization. Albanians are still traumatized with what they experienced from the state of Serbia, while the Serbian elite has created a narrative about an innocent Serbia, especially in the 1990s wars. This said narrative fuels expectations that sooner or later international circumstances will change to Serbia's advantage. Another thesis of the narrative is that Serbia has been permanently threatened by some enemy from the outside, and that the 1990s wars were “unavoidable defense wars;” besides, it is being argued that everyone has been against the Serbian people rather than the warmongering state of Serbia.

Interviewees were trying to avoid discussing the topic or speak about it in superficial remarks if they have to. The narrative Belgrade has imposed on the Serbian community only distances it from normalization of relations with the Albanian side. Reconciliation implies mutual respect, say interviewees. It is crucial that politics do not interfere in the process (especially when it comes to academic circles).<sup>123</sup>

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123 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

Generally speaking, interethnic relations are correct, there have been no serious incidents lately. Young people usually communicate within joint NGO projects but not beyond them. Many Serbs from older generations have maintained contacts with their Albanian friends and acquaintances. This is not the case when it comes to younger generations, who are divided by a language barrier and have not had a chance for building mutual trust as their elders had.

Serbs are moving freely throughout Kosovo, except for the sites of gross crimes. People – for example, people of Orahovac – are avoiding going to bigger towns on their own. They turn to Albanian doctors in urgencies. Serbs go to Albanian shopping centers that are better supplied and to Albanian restaurants. Some are going to Pristina too, but only at daytime. Serbs and Albanians, especially those working for Kosovo and international organizations, socialize in evenings in coffee shops.

### **13. The role of the media: responsibility for inciting tensions and maintaining stereotypes**

The media seated in Serbia that shower the Serbian community with weird stories are generally responsible for creating tense atmosphere among Kosovo Serbs. Young interviewees said that “Belgrade’s media are poisoning the atmosphere for Kosovo Serbs, while the media from Kosovo do not follow such strategy.”<sup>124</sup>

Ever since the time of Vojislav Koštunica Serbia has been creating the atmosphere of living here as something that is not possible, say interviewees. The Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS) airs no stories that would encourage people but only broadcasts about incidents. “All one can watch at RTS are showing are wailing people. The Informer has spinned the story about arrests being made in Pristina just as an excuse for ROSU to burst in Goraždevac. Tanjug did the same. Not everyone

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124 Interview conducted by the Helsinki Committee

could be immune to such spins. Ordinary people make do difference between a regime and a state.”<sup>125</sup>

Although the Brussels dialogue is meant to lead towards normalization and mutual understanding, the media in Serbia are spreading negative stories about Kosovo. Over the past year Serbia mainstream media have been mostly demonizing Albanians, and treating the state of Kosovo as a state of criminals and Mafiosi. When referring to the 1990s wars they usually focus on Serbs’ hardships. They never make any connection between NATO intervention and actions undertaken by Serbian forces in 1998-99.

People mostly watch RTS, TV Pink and TV Happy. These broadcasters have not aired a single reportage about the way Kosovo Albanians live. Serbs in the south are able to watch TVNI, the signal of which has been switched off for the north.

## **14. Serbian media in Kosovo: investigative journalism as a general problem**

The media scene can be seen as divided in two. All alternative media in Serbian are run by NGOs. Opposite to them stand the media that are nothing but the regime’s mouthpieces and, in fact, just branch offices of Serbia’s Office for Kosovo and Metohija. Sick and tired of biased reports, people are turning more to internet media; the elderly too.

Radio-Television of Kosovo’s channel II in Serbian is a part of Kosovo’s public broadcasting system. It is being financed from state budget; however, this is only seen as a provisional solution since the Kosovo parliament has not yet managed to regulate the issue of public broadcasting fee. The ongoing amendment of the law on RTK is expected to settle financing of the public broadcaster via fees to be paid with electricity bills.

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125 Idem.



Radio Goraždevac

RTK channel II has not yet obtained a national frequency because frequencies for Kosovo are at the disposal of Serbia in its capacity as a member of the International Union for Telecommunications. Three existing national frequencies have already been allocated so that RTK 2 has to broadcast on cable and, therefore, cannot be watched in all Serbian communities. The law obliges all Albanian cable broadcasters to air all RTK channels, including the channel II.

However, cable networks are not available to all Serbian communities that have small local cable operators of their own. If registered, the latter to air RTK II. However, most of them are still operating illegally (under the excuse that they are nothing but internet providers, etc.) and can air RTK II program arbitrarily. For the time being RTK II is available to viewers in Central Kosovo (region of Gračanica), Pomoravlje (not exactly in every village), Štrpce and Prizren. Operators in Kosovo North refuse to air its program arguing they wish not to do anything with Pristina's broadcaster. One operator that have aired it for a couple of days received threats in almost no time. RTK II is open to independent productions in Serbian language. The law obliges the channel to set aside an amount of funds for financing

independent productions, which it has failed to comply with up to now. This failure is being justified by insufficient funds.

Considering a huge influence that the Serbian List has on the community, it could be said that editorial policies are not too much under its pressure, although media outlets are when it comes to their policy for employment. However, this problem generally plagues public broadcasting services like other public institutions. Broadcasters are airing a variety of programs and report on the stands taken by all political representatives. They only do not engage in investigative journalism or dig deeper into doings of Serbian officials in public institutions.

As for the Albanian media, they do publicize numbers of pieces of investigative journalism, stories about misconducts of all sorts, and often target some Serbian minister in the Kosovo cabinet too. Over past years, the Serbian media, anyway barely ever engaged in investigative journalism, have not reported on a single case of misconduct by the representatives of the Serbian List. They are even inadequately reporting on its functioning, promises made but not kept, etc. As political situation has been on their priority list for years, they have rather neglected the issues such as democratic practice or the freedom of expression.

Independent media are those registered as the media but operate online and the ones run by NGOs. They live on projects, advertisements and grants: Radio Kontakt Plus (on projects, advertisements and grants it receives from local authorities); TV Mir from Leposavića in the ownership of Nenad Radosavljević (projects and advertisements); Radio Kim from Čaglavice (the same); Radio Herc from Štrpce (projects, advertisements and local grants from the local self-government, that is from the Serbian List branch in Štrpce); Radio Goraždevac (projects and advertisements) that have recently begun airing morning program titled “Our Morning,” which is also on the program of some Serbian radio stations and available online; and, TV Newpress Production in the ownership of Budimir Ničić (project financing).

All the independent media with project financing and free in their editorial policies have been criticizing politicians working in

Kosovo institutions for their inadequate engagement and not helping the Serbian media to sustain. It is being suspected with good reason that only “suitable” media in the north and south alike are allocated grants for their projects.

The Serbian List has done nothing to improve media policies that would regulate the functioning of local Serbian media. The Kosovo government’s calls for projects are nontransparent, say interviewees, adding that pluralism in the media is imperative. The Serbian List is doing nothing to make the public broadcasting service in Serbian available to the Serbian community throughout Kosovo; and the Independent Commission for the Media that should does nothing about it as well.

Through the Office for Kosovo and Metohija or in some other way, the Serbian government finances the Serbian media in Kosovo – some in full from the budget and to others subsidizes salaries for employees. This group of financed media includes: TV Most from Zvečan (former TV Pristina); Radio Gračanica; TV Puls in Šilovo and Radio Kosovska Mitrovica. The fact that there being financed from Belgrade determines their editorial policies. They do produce some programs of their own, but mostly air programs of RTS, TV Pink and other Serbian broadcasters.

### **Media networks**

Radio Kim (Čaglavica), Radio Kontakt Plus (Severna Mitrovca), Radio Goraždevac, Radio Klokot and Radio Herc (Štrpce) are jointly producing radio program KOSMA Newscaster. It is estimated that some 60,000 listen this program on daily basis.

TV network, the Association of Local and Regional Broadcaster in Serbian in Kosovo, established in 2009, assembles: TV Mir from Leposavić, TV Most from Zvečan, TV Puls from Šilovo and TV Herc from Štrpce, as well as the independent production New Press (in the ownership of Budimir Ničić) from Čaglavica. They are well connected and exchange programs. The show “Slobodno srpski” /Freely in Serbian/ is produced by News Press produkcija with the financial assistance from

international donor and RTK II (as a public broadcasting service the latter is obliged to partially finance independent productions).

### Online media

Online media are not bound by the law like their electronic counterparts. There is no telling how many there are such media. TV portal Kosev was a substantial contribution to media scene in Serbian and as soon as it appeared online it became the most visited online media for its unbiased reporting. Apart from stories of its own, it reruns newscasters of other media and stands for a forum of open discussion between Albanians and Serbs (journalists, analysts, etc.). The portal has been assaulted by hackers. It sustains on projects. As of 2014 the portal has been edited by NGO Center for Development of Communities. Its website quotes that its aim is “to accurately and timely keep the Serbian community in Kosovo North posted about ongoing developments, the so-called post-Brussels period and upcoming political and social processes, and to keep larger public informed about the Serbian community in Kosovo North.”

Portal *gracnicaonline.info* is run by Anđelka Ćup, who used to work for the Media Center in Čaglavica. The portal also sustains on projects. It is mostly focused on everyday life of local Serbs. Politically, it somewhat favors the Serbian List, i.e. its branch in Gračnica.

Portal *gorazdevac.com* is the portal of Radio Goraždevac. It transmits local and regional newscasters. According to the Independent Commission for the Media, out some 120 electronic media in Kosovo, 30 are in Serbian.

Except for RTK II, the media in Serbian count on funds from Serbia's Ministry for Culture and Information. The Kosovo government announces open competitions for the media irregularly despite the fact that it is bound by the law to do it in regular intervals.

Ever since 1999 the media in Serbian language in Kosovo have been living on international grants. However, the number of donor organizations has been drastically reduced in past couple of years, and those that remained mostly offer grants for specific programs only.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

Belgrade still sees the Albanian issue as an open question. It encourages the idea about unification of Albanians as an excuse for unification of Serbs, that is the resolution of the Serbian question. All newly emerged states on the territory of Yugoslavia are completing their nation state processes. Such aspirations actually rerun the same pattern that threatens with conflicts. This is why Serbia still considers Bosnia and Kosovo open questions.

Serbia would not accept the loss of Kosovo and the fact that Kosovo is an independent and sovereign state. It is fully aware it will never control it again but believes that by obstructing Kosovo's global recognition it could eventually obtain Republika Srpska. Such strategy cannot but affect positions of minority communities, either Serbian in Kosovo or Albanian in Serbia.

In order to be internationally recognized, especially by EU member-states, all countries in the region have been conditioned to adopt and implement European standards, especially when it comes to minority communities. However, regardless of their constitutions declared or laws passed, neither Kosovo nor Serbia have adopted liberal values. Speaking of minority communities, the problem is that slow social transformation hampers genuine pluralization, democratization and respect for diversity.

The assumption that ethnic homogeneity guarantees stability is rather questionable. Such solutions were preferred in the period between two world wars. However, today UN takes that building of nation states is based on bestialities, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide (ICTY).

What really leads towards conflicts – according to scholars and people in local communities alike – are weak states with weak

institutions, corruption, unequal access to resources and, naturally, the brutal legacy of Milošević's regime.

Such realities mostly affect minority communities, including the Serbian in Kosovo. Serbian MPs in the parliament of Kosovo do not stand for the interests of the Serbian community. In fact, no one stands for its interests or cares for its sustainable life in Kosovo. Serbs in Kosovo are left to their own devices. They have no capacity for keeping Belgrade at bay. Belgrade, in turn, plays on them to deny sovereignty to Kosovo.

Ever since 1999 life has not been easy for the Serbian community in Kosovo. From a predominant community, though in minority, it has been marginalized and fragmentized, and turned vulnerable practically overnight. Now it tries to find a place for itself against the new Kosovo backdrop. It has no democratic capacity and no political life that functions normally. Generally speaking, everything about it is mere existence.

Violence against members of the Serbian community has considerably reduced. But it can be said that Albanians are not focused enough on integration of the Serbian community.

To accept Kosovo's identity is the biggest challenge to Kosovo Serbs. Although Kosovo is not defined as an ethnic state – which leaves room to Kosovo's identity – Albanian predominance barely leave any room to a civilian Kosovo identity.

Relations between the Serbian community in Kosovo and Belgrade are ambivalent. On the one hand, Serbia invests considerably in the Serbian community and, on the other, undermines its standing by persistently its claiming sovereignty in Kosovo.

By financing public institutions (parallel municipalities, health-care or education) in Serbian enclaves and in Kosovo North, Belgrade holds Kosovo Serbs hostages. Since those institutions are practically the only sources of their income, Kosovo Serbs are economically fully dependent on Belgrade.

Integration rather than separation, the safeguard of minority members' individual human rights and their treatment as equal citizens, as well as their economic empowerment are the best protection

provided to minority communities. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a system capable of solving social and economic problems of majority and minority communities alike.

Normalization is still not in sight despite signatures put under the Brussels Agreement. The media are still promoting negative stereotypes. A compromise between states is a political compromise, but a genuine compromise can be reached only by moral and ethical approaches only mature and responsible elites can take. Territorial exchanges by ethnic principle (which Belgrade has in mind) cannot stand for a compromise; but the good of the people (safety, economic development, access to education, adequate healthcare, cultural development, etc.) can.

Serbia will not be admitted to EU as long as it obstructs Kosovo. The Chapter 35 provides normalization between Serbia and Kosovo as a precondition to membership.

Settlement of disputes necessitates understanding of history. Overcoming of past – as German historian Holm Zundhausen put it – calls for critical facing of one's own, our own past, rather than critical facing of the past of "others." Dialogue is the only solution. Among other things, it should result in established responsibility for everyone's role in the past. That was what Europe has done in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Dialogue between Albanians and Serbs should be developed at bilateral level but also at the level of both societies, as well as that of the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo. The latter is most important, the more so since no one is concerned with it. This was also what the Helsinki Committee's interviewees in Kosovo pointed to. However, as long as Serbs have no empathy for Albanians and as long as the Serbian society denies to face up the crimes committed against Albanians, Albanians will not be ready for a rational dialogue because their traumatic experience remained unrecognized, and for facing up their own crimes; their trauma will be passed from generation to generation.

Establishment of bilateral relations implies historical patience and mature nations. Restrictive legislations and court judgments do not

lead towards progress, but debates resulting in change perceptions of both sides, do.

Both nations cherish the same model of collective memory. In order to overcome this stereotype monologue should be turned into dialogue, and collective memory restructured. Neither identities nor ways of thought could be restructured as long as Serbs and Albanians stick to deep-rooted perceptions about one another.

## **Recommendations to the Serbian government**

- To end discussing border changes, recognize Kosovo's reality and, in accordance to the signed Brussels Agreement, start working on genuine normalization of relations with Kosovo as an independent state; this is the only way to hinder further fragmentation in the region, a threat to Serbia proper;
- To have the media under its control advocate normalization of relations and report objectively on the realities in Kosovo;
- To treat with due respect all victims of the conflict in Kosovo, including Albanian;
- To put an end to manipulation and distortion of the recent past, the more so since many evidence and decisions by ITCY testify on the contrary, especially in the case Šainović *et al.* (IT-05-87);
- To mobilize national elites for a dialogue with Kosovo Albanians so as to have two societies in dialogue; to include the Serbian community in Kosovo, and Albanian in South Serbia in the dialogue; to stop obstructing a dialogue between Kosovo Serbs and Albanians;
- To stop playing on the Serbian community in Kosovo, and support their integration into Kosovo state and society; the latter would considerably improve the community's standing and

- enable its participation in Kosovo's political, social and economic life;
- To assist the Serbian community in defining interests of its own;
  - To stop discouraging potential returnees, especially south of the Ibar River;
  - To financially support economic development so as to ensure sustainable income to members of the Serbian community, especially in the domains of agriculture, vine growing and cattle breeding that have good prospects;
  - To introduce courses in Albanian in curricula so as to facilitate communication with the Albanian side, and publish textbooks, especially history textbooks, presenting past and present in Kosovo in an unbiased manner;
  - To financially support renewal of neglected and devastated Serbian settlements;
  - To develop programs that open avenues towards prosperity of the community and thus encourage young people's stay in Kosovo.

## **Recommendations to the Kosovo government**

- To put and to discussions about border changes that lead towards destabilization and wars in the region, wholeheartedly work on integration of the Serbian community and pay more attention to the quality of its social life;
- To settle all issues related to the Serbian community's status, especially in the domain of ownership, timely and by law;
- To introduce Serbian language in curricula so as to facilitate communication between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo; language

- communication preconditions integration and coexistence;
- To establish a multiethnic university/college (engineering, natural sciences and philology – departments of Albanology, Slavistics, English, German and French) in Central Kosovo in cooperation with the international community, so as to prepare new generations from all ethnic communities for regional and European labor markets;
  - To include representatives of the Serbian community (NGO activists and outstanding figures apart from politicians) in negotiations with Belgrade, and thus promote them as legitimate factors, which have had no say up to now; to encourage dialogue between Serbs and Albanians at all levels of the society;
  - To keep Kosovo Serbs posted about laws, public policies and prospects for development at face-to-face meetings organized in cooperation with municipal administrations; in this context, to pay special attention to Serbs in enclaves and cooperate with NGOs that have already established good communication with citizens;
  - To provide economic assistance to regions with Serbian population, and create a climate of safety and security;
  - To initiate a dialogue (Reconciliation Commission) leading towards normalization; with Belgrade on the one hand, and local Serbian communities on the other;
  - To inasmuch as possible put at easy the Serbian community in the matter of the Kosovo army, and demonstrate that the army belongs to all communities in Kosovo, rather than to one community, Albanian, only;

## **Recommendations to the Serbian Orthodox Church**

- To go on with its humanitarian work and assistance to the Serbian community;
- To organize as many as possible multiethnic gatherings, especially of the young, such as those organized by the Monastery of Draganac;
- To cherish tradition and in doing it put emphasis on Serbian-Albanian centuries long ties;
- To encourage pluralism and respect for others, and, as an institution with strong influence on the Serbian community, bearing in mind its responsibility for assisting its sustainable living;
- To be more present in the media in Albanian language, putting across message of reconciliation and multiethnicity;

## **Recommendations of Serbian and Kosovo media**

- To professionally report on the Brussels dialogue (if resumed), and explain, without bias, the sum and substance of negotiations;
- To publish/air unbiased and analytical stories about the life of the Serbian community, and authentically report on people's reasoning;
- To report on models of good practice about Serbian-Albanian coexistence;

## **Recommendations to the international community**

- To provide more support to and promote values of multiethnicity and multiculturalism bearing in mind that ethnic homogeneity is not a guarantee of stability and prosperity;
- To continue supporting the Serbian community south of the Ibar River, especially its NGOs, and assist integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo North;
- To discourage any discussion about border changes that lead towards regional destabilization and conflicts;
- To strongly support multiethnic projects, presently the only mode of bringing together young people from different ethnic communities;
- To encourage organization of summer camps for Serbian and Albanian students; encourage the Office for the Youth in Tirana (a part of the Berlin process) to organize as many as possible youth meetings;
- To strongly insist on implementation of the legislation on status related issues of the Serbian community;