



Kosovo – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 26 June 2012

Information on the current state of relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo.

A *UN Security Council* report, in a section titled “Political developments and northern Kosovo” (paragraph 3), states:

“Partly as a consequence of positions and actions taken during the previous reporting period by Pristina, the Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade, the situation in northern Kosovo continues to be tense and potentially unstable, influencing much of the present political discourse.” (UN Security Council (31 January 2012) *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo*, p.1)

Paragraph 10 of this report states:

“On 9 November, tensions turned into violence in the ethnically mixed Kroji Vitakut/Brdjani neighbourhood of Mitrovica. A Kosovo Serb juvenile accused of stealing home construction materials was assaulted by a group of Kosovo Albanians in the area. Three Kosovo Serb males, including one off-duty Kosovo police officer, arrived immediately after the initial assault and requested the Kosovo police to respond. Following the arrival of Kosovo police, unknown person(s) fired automatic weapons at the three Kosovo Serbs, which resulted in the death of one and serious injury to a second. A joint EULEX and Kosovo police investigation is ongoing and the Kosovo police have opened a police substation following calls by UNMIK, both before and after the incident, for an increased police presence in the area.” (ibid, p.3)

In a section titled “Security” (paragraph 30) this report states:

“The most significant incidents during the period were two incidents of shooting fatalities. On 20 October 2011, in the ethnically mixed village of Dobrushë/Dobruša (Istog/Istok municipality), following a property dispute, a Kosovo Albanian male opened fire on three Kosovo Serb males with an automatic rifle, killing one and injuring two others. The assailant was detained by the Kosovo police and has been charged. The second fatality, reported in paragraph 10 above, is under investigation.” (ibid, p.6)

The *US Department of State* country report on Kosovo, in a section titled “National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities”, states:

“There were clashes between groups of Kosovo-Albanians and Kosovo-Serbs during the year as well as incidents of interethnic violence at border points from July through late November. On November 9, in the ethnically mixed neighborhood of Brdjani/Kroji Vitakut in North Mitrovica, a fight broke out which resulted in the shooting of two Kosovo-Serb civilians and one KP officer (also a Kosovo-Serb). One Kosovo-Serb civilian later died of his injuries. The

fight reportedly began after a Kosovo-Albanian security guard in the neighborhood saw Kosovo-Serbs removing construction materials from a Kosovo-Albanian house under renovation there. The case remained under investigation at year's end. On October 20, a Kosovo-Albanian, Nasif Visoqi, shot and killed one Kosovo-Serb man and injured two others in Dobrusa village in Istog/Istok municipality in a land dispute. Visoqi turned himself in to police, confessed to the attack, and remained in custody at year's end. No date was set for a trial in the case." (US Department of State (24 May 2012) *2011 Human Rights Reports: Kosovo*)

A *Freedom House* report, in a section titled "National Democratic Governance", states:

"In March, Kosovo began a dialogue with Serbia over technical issues such as customs and telecommunications. Backed by the European Union, these are the first high-level bilateral talks between the countries since Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence. Though five agreements were reached, Kosovo and Serbia failed to find an effective implementation mechanism. In July the Kosovo government decided to enforce reciprocity measures with Serbia by trying to enforce an effective embargo of Serbian products (ever since 'UNMIK' was removed from Kosovo customs stamps in 2008, Serbia has blocked Kosovo imports). On July 25, Pristina deployed special police forces to two checkpoints on the northern border with Serbia to block Serbian goods from entering the country. Local Serbs responded with protests, some of which turned violent. One checkpoint was burned down, and one Kosovo police officer was shot dead in the unrest. As the situation escalated, Kosovo Serbs placed barricades on the main roads between the north and the rest of the country. KFOR, the NATO-led peacekeeping mission, subsequently took control of security issues above the Ibar. Some barricades remained at year-end, surrounded by temporary checkpoints manned by KFOR troops. Despite initial support, the opposition and civic groups later criticized the government's border action as immature and poorly planned. The international community openly opposed it." (Freedom House (6 June 2012) *Nations in Transit 2012 – Kosovo*, p.4)

The Introduction to an *International Crisis Group* report states:

"Northern Kosovo has been tense since Kosovo police tried to reach two customs posts on the border with Serbia in July 2011. Standoffs between NATO's peace enforcement mission (KFOR), the EU's rule of law mission (EULEX), and local Serbs are likely to keep it unstable for some time. Kosovo considers the presence of its officials at the border essential to reestablish the rule of law and freedom of movement and improve the lives of all citizens, while securing sovereignty over its whole territory. Northern Serbs reject the Kosovo customs officials and border police and block EULEX, fearing the deployment is the beginning of the end to their way of life and very existence in the North. The current troubles began on 25 July 2011, when Pristina sent police specially trained for rapid reaction (Operational Support Units, OSU) to the North; one unit reached Jarinje (customs gate 1), while a second was stopped by Serbian roadblocks before it reached Brnjak (gate 31). During a poorly planned retreat the next day, an OSU unit was ambushed near Donje Varage, Zubin Potok municipality. One Albanian police officer was shot and killed. Masked men believed to have organised crime links arrived at Jarinje, blew up and burned the border post and forced EULEX to flee to Serbia. U.S.

KFOR troops moved in, declaring the border zone a closed military area.” (International Crisis Group (2 February 2012) *Kosovo and Serbia: A Little Goodwill Could Go A Long Way*, p.1)

A *UN Security Council* report, in a section titled “Political developments” (paragraph 6), states:

“Working against the efforts to reduce tension during this period, a number of incidents added to problems on the ground, often exacerbated by inflammatory rhetoric from all sides. Among the more worrying developments was the series of apparent tit-for-tat arrests carried out by the Kosovo and the Serbian police. On 25 February, the Kosovo police detained six Serbian employees of the Interior Ministry residing in south-eastern Kosovo, on political charges. On 8 March, two Kosovo Serb employees of the Serbian postal service were arrested by the Kosovo police for transporting Serbian invoices and banking documents. On 12 March, two more Serbian postal workers were arrested, while on 27 March four Kosovo Serbs were arrested in eastern Kosovo for allegedly transporting election materials. The following day, a Kosovo Serb employed by the Serbian postal service was arrested while delivering pension payments to individuals in Kosovo, and the pension payments were seized.” (UN Security Council (27 April 2012) *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (April 2012)*)

In a section titled “Northern Kosovo” (paragraph 11) this report states:

“The situation in the north remains extremely sensitive to any political developments between Pristina and Belgrade, and there were, alternately, both setbacks and small steps forward throughout this reporting period. Public opinion about EULEX in the north was negatively affected by confusion about the implementation of the dialogue agreements on freedom of movement and on the future integrated management of the crossing points. Kosovo Serbs were quick to react to any sense that they were not themselves made sufficiently aware of or consulted on the terms of the agreements. Through UNMIK-facilitated security coordination meetings as well as direct engagement by my Special Representative, the Mission continues its endeavours to keep local channels of dialogue open and to reduce the space for misunderstandings to grow into larger problems on the ground.” (ibid)

Paragraph 12 of this report states:

“In spite of this, the danger of more serious incidents occurring remains ever present. In the early hours of 8 April, an explosion damaged a ground-floor apartment in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood of northern Mitrovica, killing a 38-year-old Kosovo Albanian man and injuring two of his four children; his wife escaped unharmed. Later the same day in a nearby suburb, three Kosovo Albanian youths assaulted a 66-year-old Kosovo Serb, who required hospitalization for serious chest and head injuries. The Kosovo police responded by attempting to set up new fixed guard points in the area, which were then physically resisted by Kosovo Serb residents.” (ibid)

A *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* report states:

“Kosovo authorities say an ethnic Albanian man was killed when a bomb went off outside his home. The incident occurred on April 8 in the northern city of Mitrovica, an ethnically mixed town which has been a flashpoint for tensions between ethnic Albanians and Serbs. Local officials said the blast killed the 38-year-old man instantly, while his wife and four children were taken to hospital with minor injuries. The incident adds to already high tensions between majority ethnic Albanians and minority Serbs who are defying Pristina's authority in the north of Kosovo.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (8 April 2012) *Kosovo Man Killed In Serb-Dominated North*)

A *Southeast European Times* report states:

“One Serb was killed and two others wounded after Albanian and Serb groups clashed in the northern Kosovo neighbourhood of Brdjani/Bergjani on Wednesday (November 9th). Security forces were on the scene searching homes, but no arrests have been reported. Kosovo Interior Minister Bajram Rexhepi said that the incident was inter-ethnic, but the incident was being viewed as a robbery. ‘We are [launching] joint investigations with EULEX,’ Rexhepi told SETimes. ‘What is important is to catch the perpetrator(s) and bring [them to] justice.’ Brdjani/Bergjani is a mixed area where tensions have remained high after Albanians started to rebuild their houses under KFOR protection.” (Southeast European Times (10 November 2011) *Serb killed in northern Kosovo incident, tensions at borders remain*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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