

July 2004

Violence in Kosovo, March 2004

1.1. This Bulletin has been produced by the Country Information & Policy Unit, Immigration & Nationality Directorate, Home Office from information about Kosovo obtained from recognised sources. **It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.**

1.2. This Bulletin has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum / human rights determination process. The information it identifies is not exhaustive. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum / human rights claims made in the United Kingdom.

1.3. The Bulletin is sourced throughout. It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain.

1.4. This Bulletin is intended to cover information emerging from the aftermath of the ethnic unrest that took place in Kosovo around 17 – 19 March 2004.

2. Protection Issues – Before, During the March Disturbances, and Currently

Before

2.1. UNMIK to the Security Council reported in April 2004 that ethnic tension had been apparent since late 2003, though they also acknowledge that the scale and intensity of the violence could not have been foreseen. [151] The International Crisis Group (ICG) in its April 2004 report *Collapse in Kosovo* has identified a number of trends leading to the March violence, such as Albanian frustration over the status of Kosovo (particularly in relation to UNMIK's "Standards Before Status" policy) throughout 2003; the stagnant economy and declining work force / growing unemployment; disaffected youth boosting extremist groups such as the Albanian National Army (AKSh); incidents from September 2003 onwards that included the murder of Serbs [69c](p.11) ; and the continuance of Serb parallel structures (see below, 4.1.). The main event that triggered the violence was the three Albanian children drowned on 16 March 2004, allegedly by being chased into the river by Serb youths (an event that UNMIK could find no evidence that implicated the Serb community, and was rather a tragic incident of misadventure.) [69c](p.145)

Key Events

2.2. The following is a brief day-by-day account of the violence of 17 – 19 March 2004. For more detail of day-to-day events as they unfolded, please refer to CIPU Country Information Bulletin Serbia & Montenegro (Kosovo) 1/2004

2.3. Day 1: Wednesday 17 March 2004. (The following summarises the ICG account, in their April 2004 report *Collapse in Kosovo*: Appendix A: A Chronology of Violence [69c]) Events mainly focused round Mitrovica town in the morning, with Albanian mobs congregating, attacking UNMIK property in southern Mitrovica, working towards the main bridge. Main bridge held by the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) and a KFOR Polish riot squad; clashes between UNMIK /KFOR and the Albanian mobs ensued. Serb / Albanian clashes around the Three Towers Albanian enclave in northern Mitrovica. [69c](p.1)

2.4. By midday, news of trouble in Mitrovica had spread to Pristina and Caglavica: Serb mobs and traffic blocks emerged in Caglavica, and Albanian mobs assembled in Pristina with the intention of battling with the Serbs in Caglavica. Meanwhile an Albanian mob of mainly students marched from Pristina university campus to UNMIK headquarters, and then proceeded towards Caglavica in the early evening. KFOR and UNMIK evacuated the Serb population of Caglavica; rebuffed the Albanian mobs at the entrance to the village from Pristina after an initial breakthrough by the rioters. [69c](p.1) Riots went on throughout the evening and night in Pristina, with mobs torching abandoned UNMIK vehicles, unimpeded by the security forces; the mobs started to disperse at midnight and by 02:00 hrs, the streets had emptied. [69c](p.1)

2.5. By late afternoon, news had spread throughout Kosovo. Incidents in a number of locations throughout the province. In Prizren and in Lipjan, Serbs and KFOR forces were attacked, and injuries including deaths reported. [69c](p.1) Violent protests were reported in Gnjilane, in Urosevac, Kosovo Polje and Pec. Incidents of violence also reported in Novo Brdo. [69c](p.1)

2.6. The action taken by security forces on Day 1 was essentially reactive, and to minimise loss of life by evacuation and where possible using protective cordons. There were instances of the security forces losing control temporarily in individual situations; and of individual units overwhelmed by the mobs. [69c](p.1)

2.7. By the end of Day 1, according to the ICG report, the security forces were at a low point. "Overnight, throughout Kosovo the security forces were in considerable disarray, overstretched and exhausted." [69c](p.49.)

2.8. Day 2: Thursday 18 March 2004. The morning was held to be relatively calm, most of the mobs having dissipated. Most mobs reassembled and the first incidents reported around noon. Large scale violence occurred in Prizren. [69c](p.49.) The afternoon and evening was punctuated with incidents of Albanian mobs on the rampage targeting Serb property, and in violent engagement with the security forces. [69c](p.49,50,51.) In the late afternoon, two Albanian mobs converged in southern Mitrovica to attack the Ashkaelia settlement of Vushtri (previously evacuated) and destroyed the entire neighbourhood. [69c](p.51.) The ICG report notes only one incident of a non-Albanian being directly threatened on Day 2 (a Serb nun held prisoner at Devic convent, Drenica); otherwise, the security forces had ensured the safe evacuation of targeted groups. [69c](p.52.)

2.9. Action taken during Day 2 by the security forces revolved around the evacuation of all people in danger, mainly to local KFOR bases, and on to enclaves if possible (see below, Serbs.) Property was cordoned off by KFOR and other security forces; in a number of places, KFOR established blocks on the routes of Albanian mobs, and attempted to pacify them. The Serb village of Caglavica was attacked again, and KFOR resisted effectively the Albanian mobs. [69c](pp.52.)

2.10. Day 3: Friday 19 March 2004. According to the ICG report, 'Attempts by agitators in several locations around Kosovo to resume the violence fizzled out.' [69c](p.52.) Extremist organisations reined in their agitators. [69c](pp.18,52.)

2.11. Action taken on Day 3 by the security forces consisted of consolidating the uneasy peace; reinforcements flown into Pristina overnight took control of patrolling the city's streets in the morning. [69c](p.51.)

Subsequent Events

2.12. According to the report to the Security Council, April 2004:-
'UNMIK police are actively investigating all incidents related to the violent events. So far, investigations have resulted in over 260 arrests in connection with the violence. A further 400 arrests have been made for violations of curfew, which had been imposed in some areas by KFOR and UNMIK police to prevent further violence. International prosecutors are currently working on more than 45 cases and approximately 120 other cases are being handled by the local judiciary.' [151](p.3)

3. Groups affected by the Violence

3.1. Serbs According to the UNHCR in their letter of the 30 March 2004 stating their position on the consequences of the violence, the Serbs were the prime targets of the majority of attacks by the Albanian mobs.[171](p.2) According to the Serbian Government Intelligence Service website, in a number of known hot spots, they resisted and/or exacerbated the violence (Mitrovica, Caglavica): however, in other locations, they were in danger and (in the main) under direct protection from the security forces. [80c] According to the Secretary General's report to the Security Council, 30 April 2004, attacks on Kosovo Serbs occurred throughout Kosovo and involved primarily established communities that had remained in Kosovo in 1999 (Gracanica, Mitrovica), as well as a small number of sites of recent returns (for instance, Pristina, Belo Polje near Pec, and Vucitrn). [151](p.1)

3.2. The Serbian Government Intelligence Service website gives area by area accounts of incidents: Serbs were expelled from the following places and are currently living under KFOR protection or relocated to Gracanica or Laplje Selo: Pristina (about 250 expelled); Obilic (about 1,500 expelled); Kosovo Polje (as many as 2000 expelled);Svinjare (120 expelled); Prizren (60 expelled); Pec (about 1,000 expelled) – an maximal approximate total of 4,930 Serb IDPs.[80c] This number is similar to the stated figure of 4,500 in the ICG report *Collapse in Kosovo* (April 2004). [69c](p.1) UNMIK has different figures, with the SRSG stating in his quarterly report to the UN Security Council in April 2004, that of the 4,100 minority community members who were displaced by the 17 – 19 March violence, 82 percent were Kosovo Serbs; the majority of the 4,100 fleeing came from Pristina and southern Mitrovica regions (42% and 40% respectively).[151](p.6) The UNHCR, in March 2004, from the amount of assistance that they provided after the violence to IDPs and refugees, confirmed 3,200 cases very quickly after the violence. [170]

3.3. RAE (Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptians) The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), through the Greek Helsinki Monitor, reported on the 10 June 2004 that an estimated 360 RAE were displaced by the March 2004 violence. [26d](p.2) The ERRC report also mentioned attacks (typically, grenade throwing incidents) and general threats to

members of the RAE community in the months leading up to March 2004; and the ERRC contends 'Thus, the events of March 2004 frequently referred to as "renewed violence", are more properly regarded as an intensification of an ethnic cleansing campaign ongoing since June 1999.' [26d](p.2) The Amnesty International report, *The March Violence: KFOR and UNMIK's failure to protect the rights of the minority communities* of 8 July 2004 mentions the Kosovo Ombudsman's letter of 1 June 2004. It was addressed to the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Sweden, telling them to reconsider their deportations of Ashkaelia and Roma. It stated, "The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that neither UNMIK nor the local police are in a position to guarantee the safety of members of these national minorities" (as reported to AI by the UNMIK Office of Returns and Communities.) [3m](p.29,30)

3.4. According to the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), in their photo-report of 30 March 2004, in Vushtrri/Vucitrn, 260 Ashkaelia were left homeless as two Ashkaelia neighbourhoods burnt down by ethnic Albanian mobs. The Roma and Serb populations of Vucitrn had been driven away previously in 1999. The Ashkaelia are currently under KFOR protection in the French KFOR camp near Novo Selo. [26e]The ERRC published photographs of the destruction of one of the two Ashkaelia neighbourhoods. [26e]

3.5. Goranis According to the Serbian Intelligence Service, in Prizren, Goranis were attacked, and now under KFOR protection.[80c](Prizren) No incidents reported in the Dragas region.

3.6. Bosniaks According to the Serbian Intelligence Service, the Bosniak community, c.300 (estimated 1,500 in February 2000), in Pristina was expelled and is under KFOR protection. The Bosniak community in northern Mitrovica, the *Bosnjacka Malhala*, was attacked by Albanian mobs on 17 March 2004.[80c](Mitrovica)

3.7. Amnesty International (AI) has claimed, in AI's 8 July report, that on the basis of the Prizren violence, that the Gorani and Bosniak communities' security should be reconsidered post-March 2004, stating:-

'Prior to the March events, ORC (UNMIK Office of Returns and Communities) and UNHCR considered that Gorani, Bosniaks and Turks were able to safely return to Kosovo. These communities mainly live in the Prizren municipality where in March many Serbs were displaced from their homes, some after violent attacks, and many houses, several churches and other historic Serb buildings were burned down (see above [in AI report]). Although Gorani, Bosniaks and Turks were rarely directly targeted in the March riots, the ORC considers that their freedom of movement has been limited and their perceptions of risk to their personal security have increased since the March events. Amnesty International urges the authorities in host countries to consider each individual on a case-by-case basis and again refrain from blanket deportations.' [3m](p.30)

3.7. Albanians. According to the IGC report of April 2004, there is a community in Northern Mitrovica (city) in the Three Towers (*Tri solitera*) area, of mainly three apartment blocks insulated from Serb areas on all sides with access via a pontoon foot bridge, patrolled by KFOR. [69c](p.44) The Serbian Intelligence service has claimed that during the first day of the Mitrovica riots, ethnic Albanian mobs from Southern Mitrovica used the Three Towers enclave as a vantage point to attack the Serbs near by; and French KFOR troops later flushed out snipers from the blocks. [80c](Mitrovica)

3.8. The report to the Security Council pointed out that the Kosovan Albanian officials of the PISGs and representatives and leaders of all the ethnic groups signed an open letter on 2 April 2004 condemning the violence. [151](p.4) The ICG report gives further details and comment on the Albanian groups implicated in the March 2004 violence. [69c](pp.10, 17,18,45)

3.9. Freedom of movement for ethnic minorities has practically ceased in Kosovo. According to the Report to the Security Council, 'The violence has had an extremely negative impact on the freedom of movement of members of the minority communities of Kosovo, particularly Kosovo Serbs, who have been affected by the deterioration in the security environment.' [151](p.7) Roma and Ashkaelia are also mentioned as being adversely affected in their movement in Kosovo, reducing their capacity to work as day labourers. [151](p.7) 65 ethnic minority communities are now guarded by KFOR checkpoints and UNMIK humanitarian bus services have been limited by security issues. [151](p.7) 'This [the security situation] has profoundly undermined the position of the minority communities, who are now more isolated than at any time in the past three years.' [151](p.7) The UNHCR has echoed the lack of freedom of movement in their position paper issued 30 March 2004: 'Freedom of movement and access to essential services, not guaranteed before the current outbreak of violence, have deteriorated even further.' [17n](p.2)

3.10. Returns of refugees to and around Kosovo. According to the report to the Security Council, April 2004, 'The violence in March has completely reversed the returns process. Minority areas were targeted, sending a message that minorities and returnees were not welcome in Kosovo. In less than 48 hours, 4,100 minority community members were newly displaced, more than the total of 3,664 that had returned throughout 2003.' [151](p.6) The report continues that in the six weeks after the violence, 250 IDPs decided to return to their original homes. [151](p.6)

3.11. AI sets out in their July report their opinions as to the return of ethnic minorities to Kosovo (on individual ethnic groups, see above) concluding:-

'Amnesty International urges all countries to desist from forcibly returning all Serbs, Roma, and Ashkali as well as Albanians if they originate from minority communities such as N. Mitrovica/e, Leposavic, or Zubin Potok.' [3m](p.30)

4. Issues Arising

4.1. The Security Services in Kosovo: UNMIK / KFOR / KPS and the KPC. To clarify with reference to the CIPU April 2004 country report, the policing of Kosovo is carried out jointly by UNMIK CIVPOL and the Kosovan Police Service (KPS): UNMIK CIVPOL's numbers are being reduced as the KPS develops capacity and expertise. KFOR are the multinational brigades of peace-keeping troops who had previously handed policing functions over to UNMIK. The Kosovo Protection Corps is a residual Albanian force that is being developed as an unarmed civil emergency organisation under the monitoring of UNMIK.[CIPU Country Report for Serbia and Montenegro, April 2004 , Kosovo section, para. K.5.29] The ICG report in Section VI *A Security System Near Collapse* attempts to explain the complex relations of the security forces inter-relations during and after the riots. [69c](p.19 - 24.) Likewise the footnotes to pages 1 and 2 of the Amnesty International report, *The March Violence*, published 8 July 2004, outline the size and nature of all four services, drawing on UN sources. [3m](pp.1,2, footnotes) The official UN analysis of the crisis and the security forces' involvement will be reported after the official investigation of Norwegian Ambassador Kai Eide (appointed by the Secretary-General on 11 June 2004). [191](p.1) The date of when the report is to be published is not reported.

4.2. The ICG report alleges a rift between UNMIK police officers and KFOR commanders [69c](p.19); that a policy of “putting lives before property” was an inadequate policing response [69c](p.19); that both KFOR and UNMIK were overwhelmed [69c](p.19); that KFOR in particular responded poorly and kept at a distance, particularly when religious sites were attacked [69c](p.20); the KPS was allegedly left without a coherent lead, also standing by at the destruction of property [69c](p.20); KPS officers were used by UNMIK CIVPOL as defusers of situations in some instances [69c](p.20).

4.3. The ICG report singles out Mitrovica as a key incident point: ‘It was in the divided town of Mitrovica that coordination between troops and police reached both its highest and lowest point, depending on which side of the river.’ [69c](p.20) The ICG report alleges that different national KFOR groups were in negotiation with different ethnic groups and acted in their favour at times. [69c](p.23,24) The ICG report’s security section also comes to a further conclusion: ‘KFOR no longer has adequate forces in Kosovo to oppose a determined Serbian military incursion.’ [69c](p.24)

4.4. Regarding the actions of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), the ICG report refers to KFOR reliance, particularly of the US KFOR contingent of Southern Mitrovica, on KPC cooperation and involvement in pacifying the mobs. [69c](p.23) On one occasion the KPC were used to guard a Serb religious site. [69c](p.23) Amnesty International confirms US KFOR usage, and comments ‘During the March events the KPC mounted joint patrols with US KFOR in some areas and thus for the first time was granted a public security role which it had previously been denied by both UNMIK and COMKFOR.’ [3m](p.18) UNMIK’s account of KPC involvement, though the Secretary-General’s report to the UN Security Council (April 2004), is as follows:-

‘Although it is too early to obtain an accurate and complete overview of the performance of KPC members during the recent violence, it appears that the Kosovo Protection Corps as an organization performed professionally, although the possibility remains that some members may have active links with extremist organizations whose history has its roots in the Kosovo Liberation Army. During the violence, KPC provided medical assistance and search-and-rescue teams for victims of the violence. At the request of KFOR as an emergency measure, KPC took part in guarding minority infrastructure in some places, such as Serbian churches.’ [151](p.12)

4.5. The Amnesty International report, *The March Violence: KFOR and UNMIK’s failure to protect the rights of the minority communities* of 8 July 2004 highlighted the allegations that KFOR and UNMIK had been limited, and arguably complacent, in their response, particularly in acquiescing to the destruction of property. [3m](p.7ff)

4.6. Parallel structures. The Serb community runs parallel institutions to the PISGs in the three northern-most municipalities and in Northern Mitrovica (city), according to the ICG report of April 2004. [69c](p.7) The parallel structures represent to the Serbs a holding on to access to services and residual power, and thus a relative autonomy. UNMIK expressed concerns about the continuance and intransigence of the Serb parallel structures in late 2003 and by February 2004, in the SRSG’s quarterly report to the UN Security Council, were highly critical of Serb intransigence. [69c](p.8) The effects of the March 2004 violence, according to the ICG report, is to have rendered PISG promises of security for Serbs meaningless. The ICG report recommends that UNMIK proceeds to recognise the Serb parallel structures: ‘Such regularisation of parallel structures should be for the purpose of paving the way for decentralisation of local government authority along the lines of the

Council of Europe (Civiletti) plan – leading towards a looser and less “integrated” mode of co-existence than imagined in UNMIK’s present unitary administration model.’ [69c](p.39)

4.7. Further Investigation. The AI report of July 2004 reports that UNMIK had written a full report on its own (UNMIK’s) analysis of the March Violence, delivered to the UN on 3 June 2004 though not released publicly (as of 24 June 2004). [3m](p.19) UNMIK, reported by AI, also mentioned a forthcoming report on the March Violence on 17 June 2004: as AI comments ‘It remains unclear the difference between the forthcoming report and that already delivered to the UN.’ [3m](p.19) The second, forthcoming report would seem to be the forthcoming Eide investigation report. (*see above*, 4.1)

4.8. Possible further violence. The then SRSG, Harri Holkeri, in his April 2004 report to the UN Security Council stated:-

‘The situation in Kosovo remains tense, and further violence is possible. In view of this, KFOR and UNMIK police are maintaining a high level of visibility and presence, particularly in minority areas.’ [15l](p.3, para.9)

[end]

Reference to Sources

[3k] Amnesty International, 1 April 2004, *Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo) The Legacy of past human rights abuses* (60 pages) at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR700102004?open&of=ENG-YUG>

[3m] Amnesty International, 8 July 2004, *Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo/Kosova) The March Violence: KFOR and UNMIK's failure to protect the rights of the minority communities*. (33 pages) at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR700162004?open&of=ENG-YUG>

[9j] Human Rights Watch, 16 June 2004, *Joint statement on the Situation of Internally Displaced and Refugee Minorities from Kosovo* (2 pages) at http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/06/16/serbia8845_txt.htm

[15l] United Nations, Security Council S/2004/348 *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo*. (18 pages) at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/sgrep04.html>

[17n] UNHCR *The UNHCR's position on the international protection needs of individuals from Kosovo in light of recent inter-ethnic confrontations* Dated 30 March 2004, sent by London UNHCR to CIPU, 31 March 2004. (no web link: contents reported on in Serbia & Montenegro (Kosovo) Country Information Bulletin 2/2004 (dated 2 April 2004).

[26e] European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), *Photo Report about Kosovo Crisis*, 30 March 2004. At http://lists.errc.org/publications/photos/kosovo_2004.html (Accessed 14 June 2004)

[69c] International Crisis Group, Europe Report 155, *Collapse in Kosovo*, 22 April 2004. (58 pages) at <http://www.crisisweb.org/home/index.cfm>

[75b] European Commission, Stabilisation and Association Report 2004, COM(2004) 206 final (58 pages) at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep3/cr_s-m.pdf

[80c] Serbian Government – Security Information Agency (BIA – Bezbednosno Informativna Agencija) (Website – www.bia.sr.gov.yu) The effects of the March 2004 violence in 10 locations.

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July 2004