

NATIONS UNIES



(267)

UNITED NATIONS

26/6-00

OFFICE DE LA COORDINATION
DES AFFAIRES HUMANITAIRES

OCHA-Geneva

OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION
OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM

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SUBJECT: Mission of the ERC, a.i. to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE IS FROM DAVID S. BASSIOUNI, COORDINATOR, IASC/ECHA SECRETARIAT:

Please find attached for your information the report of Ms. Carolyn McAskie, the ERC, a.i., of her mission to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), including Kosovo, during the period 26 May through 2 June 2000.

The report contains a number of recommendations which Ms. McAskie discussed with government officials, representatives of the international community and national NGOs during her mission. The recommendations received the broad support of her interlocutors, and are now being shared with the Humanitarian Coordinator for the FRY (excluding Kosovo), the Humanitarian Coordinator-designate for Kosovo, and OCHA management for their collective implementation.

Aside from lessons learned from this experience, the principal recommendations are designed to enhance outreach and information flow on the humanitarian programme to local communities, particularly displaced persons and minority groups throughout the FRY.

Report on the mission of Ms. Carolyn McAskie
to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), including Kosovo
26 May – 2 June 2000

Summary

1. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, a.i., Ms. Carolyn McAskie, visited Belgrade, Podgorica and Pristina between 26 May and 2 June 2000. *Inter alia*, the mission was timed to coincide with the final weeks of Mr. Dennis McNamara's posting as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Humanitarian Affairs, and thus to enable a review of OCHA's role in supporting the coordination of humanitarian action in Kosovo during the transition phase, following the demise of UNMIK's Pillar One.
2. The mission was the first visit to Belgrade by a senior official of the UN Secretariat since that of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello in May 1999, during the NATO air campaign. In each location, Ms. McAskie met representatives of donors, UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement, international and national non-governmental organisations. She also met with the Deputy Federal Ministers for Foreign Affairs and for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Humanitarian Affairs in Belgrade, the Prime Minister and the Commissioner for Displaced Persons in Podgorica, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, his four Deputies and the Secretary-General of NATO in Pristina. She also participated as an observer in the Kosovo Transitional Council. In each location, a field visit was undertaken to assess conditions among refugee, IDP and minority populations. Ms. McAskie is most grateful to UNHCR field staff and the relevant NGO partners for arranging these visits.
3. The nature of the complex series of crises in the Balkans is reflected in the political exigencies shaping international policy on the ground. As a result, the mission heard a number of key humanitarian partners express their frustration in the face of both overt and implicit politicisation of aid from a variety of quarters, along with their need to uphold humanitarian principles within the highly politicised context of southeastern Europe. Two frequently cited examples of this political/humanitarian debate were: the question of voluntary and sustainable, versus heavily escorted and fragile, minority returns to volatile environments in Kosovo; and the efforts of European capitals to provide targeted "rehabilitation" assistance to opposition municipalities in Serbia¹, while avoiding placing political conditionality on humanitarian assistance.
4. The principal impression from discussions and field visits throughout the mission was one of poor information flow: to beneficiaries and local communities; and to and among international donor, political and agency (including UN agency) representatives in the three separate locations of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. For instance, different UN entities deal with the FRY and its component parts in different ways. It was evident that this degree of fragmentation can impede the work of the humanitarian community in Serbia, where there is a vital lack of information regarding the degree of intervention in support of vulnerable Serb communities in all parts of the FRY. Poor communication and information has also contributed to a potentially dangerous isolationism within the international community in each area, which could lead to a failure to take account of the trans-boundary implications of aid programmes and political changes. This is especially worrying, as it is

¹ Throughout this note, and for simplicity, the term "Serbia" denotes the Republic of Serbia of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, excluding the United Nations-administered province of Kosovo.

one of the hallmarks of Balkans conflicts that developments in one region are rarely without implications elsewhere.

5. For this reason, it was clear that the humanitarian community – which in many respects has the greatest (albeit limited) freedom of movement and action across all parts of the FRY – can be most successful if it operates on the basis of the “integrated, regional approach” advocated by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Mr. Carl Bildt. The humanitarian community, by upholding clearly its commitment to the principles of impartiality and neutrality, has an entrée to parts of the FRY that others, for the moment, do not.

6. Simultaneously, the humanitarian community has a special role to play in encouraging other parts of the international community to engage early on, such that the development and local actors are already running up to speed and within the same strategic framework, when the time comes for the humanitarians to pass on the baton and drop out of the race.

7. A secondary point noted during the mission was the tendency of local communities to look mainly to the international community, and the degree of its ability to guarantee security, for solutions to local conflicts. There was a general reluctance to express faith in community-based measures aimed at a resolution of conflict, a factor which the international community must address head on.

Belgrade, Serbia

8. The ongoing international isolation of Serbia is, if anything, increasingly pronounced. This situation has complicated efforts to implement humanitarian programmes, and has increasingly jeopardised the presence of remaining international bodies.

9. Symptomatic of this increasing gulf between the regime and the international community was the recent letter of the Federal Minister of Justice to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Although a signatory and guarantor of the Dayton Accords, the FRY was excluded from the latest Peace Implementation Council in Brussels (ostensibly as a signal of the European Union’s condemnation of the seizure of the independent media company, Studio B). This led to vociferous complaints from the authorities to local representatives of the European Union (EU), and démarches to the UN Liaison Office (UNLO) and the Belgrade Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. UNLO reported that in this environment, its negotiations on a status agreement with the authorities were not progressing.

10. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in Serbia reported finding themselves facing similar threats, with no legalised status and subject to random visits from the financial police.² Statements of senior government officials, widely covered in state-owned media, periodically accuse international humanitarian personnel of espionage and national humanitarian personnel of treachery, and threaten retribution. Hostility from some members of the population towards internationals, particularly those from NATO states, has led to frequent incidents of threatening remarks or behaviour against NGO and UN staff. This difficult operating environment has contributed to the fact that the international NGO community in Serbia – where the vulnerable beneficiary case-load is larger – is one-tenth the size of that in Kosovo.³

² The international NGO representatives were even reluctant to voice their concerns to the mission, for fear of being monitored.

³ There are currently only 35 international NGOs in Serbia, as compared with 67 in Montenegro, and over 300 in Kosovo.

constructive engagement with Podgorica on the subject of the federal relationship; a failure on this front would also have serious repercussions. He also stressed that any major development such as a *de facto* mono-ethnic or independent Kosovo or a failure to oust the regime in upcoming federal elections, would have immediate and serious repercussions in Montenegro, including the possibility of secession, which he did not favour. Independence for Kosovo would, in addition to impacting Montenegro, also undermine the Dayton accords and the integrity of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM). The only tenable option in terms of regional stability would be a multi-ethnic Kosovo within the FRY, with guarantees from the international community such that all minorities could return in safety and security. Peace in Kosovo, he asserted, would only come about if the FRY's neighbours, in particular fYROM and Albania, worked to support these common goals, and if moderates such as Rugova and Surroi gained influence.

22. On the issue of IDPs, Ms. McAskie expressed the international community's gratitude for the authorities' commitment to an open door policy, and to accepting Serb IDPs until such time as conditions for their return were in place. The Prime Minister underlined the tremendous burden that the high proportion of displaced was placing on the local population at this difficult time, particularly in the economic sphere. As regards refugee return to neighbouring states, the Prime Minister noted that the current obstacles were more at the local level now that state-level policies had been changed. Ms. McAskie noted that the UNHCR-sponsored go-and-see visits for displaced Roma, following the signature of the Joint Plan of Action in Pristina, was an encouraging first step toward returns, and deserved extra support.

23. Agencies commended OCHA's role in supporting the preparation of inter-agency contingency plans, on the basis of commonly agreed scenarios, and also supported OCHA's efforts on analysis of the transition and its impact on vulnerability. The proposal to foster a climate of greater trans-boundary information flow, including between communities and among international agencies, also met with strong support. OCHA will continue to monitor the need for its presence in Montenegro, and will hold follow up discussions with UNDP on the feasibility of their presence in the republic.

Pristina, UN-administered province of Kosovo

24. The situation in Kosovo, while predominantly positive on the humanitarian side, continues to present the international community with clear challenges. Many of these are linked to developments in the rest of the FRY, in particular minority returns and the impact of trans-boundary political developments and information flow.

25. After the unprecedented winter-time humanitarian effort, the transition from emergency relief to long-term sustainable development in Kosovo is now in full swing. Donor entities have transferred funding lines almost completely to bilateral development and technical assistance. UNMIK is gradually assuming responsibility for social welfare and reconstruction, with varying success in the different sectors. Remaining humanitarian actors are working with UNMIK departments to ensure that gaps and duplications are minimised.

26. Agencies commended OCHA's role in supporting the elaboration of Pillar One's strategic plan for the transition, and its liaison efforts with UNMIK departments to promote transitional priorities and the importance of UNMIK engagement with humanitarian actors. Clearly, however, much work remains to ensure a smooth transfer before the humanitarian actors are able to disengage completely. All interlocutors expressed support for the new post of Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in this regard, stressing the importance of a humanitarian advocate during the key transition phase.

security when possible (a point that Ms. McAskie raised in her meetings with Government officials and with IDPs). The UN Liaison Office, which had been active in press and information up to March 1999, is now in too precarious a situation (given its lack of legal status) vis à vis the authorities to overtly publicise this commitment. The perception of imbalance – that the international community is not only pro-Albanian, but anti-Serb – has had a significant impact both on the safety and security of international agencies and their ability to reach all communities in need: events in Kosovo have a knock-on effect in Serbia, and vice versa. The perceived bias, while not the main factor, has certainly also reduced the willingness of the affected communities to return, reintegrate and reconcile. Ms. McAskie took note of agencies' concerns regarding the adverse impact of the perception of bias on the security of humanitarian actors in Serbia, and undertook to raise these concerns with the UN Security Coordinator.

17. There was general agreement from representatives of the international community, local civil society and relevant Government officials, that the humanitarian community can play a role in filling this information gap in a practical and non-political manner. Under the auspices of the Humanitarian Coordinator for the FRY excluding Kosovo, and to supplement and support the efforts of the Deputy SRSG for Humanitarian Affairs in Kosovo, it was agreed that OCHA could produce an inter-agency FRY-wide humanitarian newsletter in local languages, to be distributed widely among officials, representatives of civil society and beneficiaries, including IDPs.

Podgorica, Montenegro

18. Montenegro presented a closely linked yet very different set of issues from Serbia. A fourfold transition is currently occurring: from a Tito-era economy; from the isolation of the 1990s; from the "junior partner" federal relationship; and from the FRY's eastern-oriented external policy. Despite these upheavals, the humanitarian situation in the republic is not as serious as in Serbia, and indeed, after Belgrade, the sensation is of an island of stability in a turbulent sea. In part, this could be attributed to the fact that significant development assistance is being pumped in, primarily through EU channels, thereby alleviating the needs of this small population of 650,000, propping up the social welfare system, and demonstrating to the population that their government's pro-western orientation can deliver tangible results.

19. In comparing the humanitarian situation in Montenegro to that in Serbia, agencies cautioned that their programmes should not be judged in accordance with strictly conventional criteria, but should be seen as both post- and pre-emergency interventions with a stabilising impact. The small republic is immensely susceptible to external developments, and while the quantity of funding could be criticised as being disproportionately high, as long as donor will exists, and stability is thereby bolstered, the current level of intervention is preferable to a premature down-scaling of aid.

20. In this respect, there are grounds for believing that the situation in Montenegro might become more serious in the near future, subject to political developments in Belgrade and Pristina. The tense relations with the federal government were palpable during the mission, as evidenced by Serbia's blockade on the small republic (particularly affecting both food and drug supply to Montenegro), intense rhetoric regarding the upcoming municipal elections, and the assassination of President Djukanovic's security adviser.

21. The Montenegrin Prime Minister, however, confirmed to Ms. McAskie his Government's commitment – insofar as it could control events – to peaceful and democratic change. The Montenegrin leadership was currently awaiting a public commitment from the Serbian opposition to

collection, analysis and provision of data-related services such as mapping. The Centre is increasingly playing a crucial role in advancing the transition, through the provision of data management services to the UNMIK Pillars, thereby ensuring that the bulk of humanitarian data already collected and analysed is being put to good use. Key in this has been the Centre's role in setting, maintaining and sharing common standards to ensure compatibility of surveys and other key data.

31. A significant concern on the strategic planning side, however, is the duplication of non-compatible databases among non-UN actors. According to senior planning staff from the Office of the SRSB and Pillar Two, this had hampered UNMIK's ability to identify gaps and duplications, or to record achievements measured against success criteria and the UNMIK strategic plan. There were reported to be up to seventy different database managers in Kosovo, many of whom were gathering and producing information that was neither shared nor compatible. It was reported, for example, that the International Management Group (an EU entity) had spent US\$5 million on its database, using over sixty international staff to gather and generate a vast quantity of data that was shared only with Brussels. After months of lobbying, and only when the IMG was about to be phased out, was it shared (in a non-compatible format) with UNMIK.

32. During a frank meeting between OCHA staff and senior strategic planning staff from UNMIK, Ms. McAskie agreed that the knowledge resource and capacities of the Centre should be directed toward the common goal of supporting a central Kosovo information and planning hub. However, the Centre's original outward focus should nonetheless be preserved: local outreach and provision of information services, both to the international humanitarian/development community and, increasingly, to the municipalities and the local Kosovar community, must remain its over-arching goals. This was especially vital in view of many comments that information flow in UNMIK was one-way and upwards. The Centre has a special role to promote a culture of open information, and it was anticipated that planning and leading the evolution of the Centre, in light of the transition, would be a core task of the new HC.

33. Finally, agencies expressed their conviction that the new HC should work closely with the recently appointed UN Development Coordinator (DC), with whom Ms. McAskie was unable to meet, as he was out of town. However, there were concerns that the DC had not yet developed terms of reference nor a strategic plan. In this connection, it was recognised that the UN Development Group is operating in Kosovo in a context where its members have a smaller share of a complex, multi-actor pie. An optimum outcome would be for the new HC and the DC to work jointly to enhance the relationship of the UN agencies within and in support of UNMIK. Bearing in mind the progress of the transition and the evolving role of the DC, the position of HC will be reviewed at the end of 2000.

Recommendations

- A FRY-wide weekly, inter-agency humanitarian newsletter should be established, translated into local languages, and disseminated through humanitarian networks (refugee and IDP camps, municipal authorities, local journalists, national civil society and non-governmental organisations). The newsletter should focus, *inter alia*, on providing information regarding international and local efforts in support of minorities. The newsletter should build upon, and not duplicate, already existing information dissemination efforts by individual agencies.

Some UN agencies, while noting that "coordination worked" in Kosovo thanks to the personal approach and efforts of senior staff, including the Deputy SRSG in Pillar One, also noted their hope that this inter-agency approved HC appointment would clarify some of the ambiguities of the lead agency arrangement.

27. For minority populations⁴ in Kosovo, the humanitarian situation is extremely complex. Many minority communities live in enclaves, contained by barbed wire and KFOR checkpoints. Freedom of movement is often only possible under armed escort, and parallel services supported by humanitarian aid, not linked to services being established by UNMIK, are in many places the only means of ensuring minority access to basic health, education and community services. Raw proof of the ongoing insecurity of minorities was clear: eight Serbs were killed in five separate attacks during the period 28 May - 2 June. The lack of jobs, already chronic across Kosovo, affects minority populations the most: even UNMIK is often unable to ensure the provision of adequate security such that the places reserved for minorities in municipal and regional offices are filled.

28. Practical security issues (affecting both national and international staff) also impact the ability of international actors to reach minorities: NGOs in particular reported difficulty working in the enclaves. UNHCR has also expressed serious reservations about the safety of humanitarian workers and their assets in volatile minority areas, in a climate where the respective roles and resources of KFOR and UNMIK police in support of both humanitarians and minorities remains unclear. The recent events in Mitrovica, where UNHCR staff were left to fend for themselves as rioters descended on their office and began burning their cars, is one case in point.

29. The sustainability of minorities' situation in Kosovo is therefore in question, and yet the political imperative of ensuring a multi-ethnic Kosovo requires the political arm of UNMIK to hasten minority returns, especially those of the Serb community. UNHCR is also concerned about the uncomfortable trade-off between the provision of assistance to minorities who had remained, to ensure a minimum of dignity and access, and the provision of incentives for those hoping to return. In light of these concerns, the personal commitment of the Deputy SRSG for Humanitarian Affairs to advocacy on minority protection issues drew expressions of respect from all interlocutors, both among the humanitarian community and from the SRSG and his senior staff. The latter also encouraged OCHA to assume a greater role in terms of outreach to local communities, especially minorities, in terms of information flow (a suggestion strongly supported by local NGOs in Kosovo). Care must also be taken that as humanitarian assistance winds down, the relatively greater assistance given to minority communities, in light of lack of access to UNMIK services, does not lead to a further backlash against them by majority groups. In short, as all actors acknowledge, a concrete goal of the collective international effort is to "mainstream" minorities. Peace-building and reconciliation will be indispensable to success in this realm, and UNMIK's efforts, through the activities of all four pillars, toward these goals deserve strong encouragement.⁵

30. All interlocutors expressed strong support for the Humanitarian Community Information Centre. From the outset, the Centre (an inter-agency endeavour staffed and resourced primarily by OCHA, with support from UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs) has drawn in all actors, providing a neutral space for meetings, information services, including on logistics and security, and active data

⁴ This term is taken to mean those persons who are living as a minority within their local community. While the bulk of such persons are Serbs, Roma and Ashkalia, there are some minority enclaves of Albanians, to which this term therefore also applies.

⁵ E.g. The UNHCR sponsored Humanitarian Roundtable, which brought together representatives of Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptian communities with Kosovar Albanian leaders, and led to the signing of a Platform for Joint Action.

- The Humanitarian Coordinator for Kosovo should work closely with UNMIK, donors, the UN Development Coordinator and other interested actors (including representatives of Kosovar society), and on the basis of the Humanitarian Community Information Centre's strategic plan, to develop a strategy to support the following goals: enhanced integrated planning and information management for UNMIK; the promotion of common data standards and an open information culture; and a hand-over strategy for the Centre, which should include options for the Centre eventually to become a local Kosovar resource.
- Over the coming months, OCHA should focus on greater outreach to the local community and to the municipal level administration, including UNMIK, NGOs and local communities. A two-pronged strategy of consultation and outreach to national NGOs in Pristina, and the deployment of a strong network of two to four OCHA field liaison officers supporting the new HC, particularly over the summer months and the ensuing UNMIK staff turnover, should combine to tackle remaining transitional and informational obstacles. Such a network should incorporate training for municipal-level decision makers on humanitarian and minority issues, in close consultation with UN agencies, and the promotion of data exchange and the carrying of the Centre's services to the local level. OCHA must ensure that the field liaison officers are adequately equipped, and preferably have good knowledge of the Kosovo context.
- In view of the complexity of trans-boundary issues, and the fact that currently only humanitarians travel freely to all parts of the FRY, the two Humanitarian Coordinators should place a high priority on close cooperation, including regular exchange visits and briefings at regular inter-agency and UNMIK meetings. OCHA staff should also be encouraged to travel frequently, to share information and foster stronger inter-office and interagency links.
- In light of the relative success of coordination efforts inside Kosovo, coupled with agencies' concerns regarding the ambiguities of the lead agency arrangement and OCHA's role in it, OCHA should clarify, in consultation with the IASC, existing lead agency and coordination responsibilities in southeastern Europe, building also upon the UNHCR Independent Evaluation and other studies. This would also facilitate a coordinated response in the event of a future crisis in the region.
- Given the groundbreaking information standardisation and data management work of the Humanitarian Community Information Centre, OCHA should elaborate lessons from the Centre's experience, with a view to establishing its replicability in other emergencies. Included in such a study should be an analysis of lessons and best practice in coordination in transition situations and integrated peacekeeping missions.
- The Humanitarian Coordinator for Kosovo and the Development Coordinator should work in tandem to produce a game plan to maximise the efficient use of the resources and expertise of UN agency and other humanitarian/development partners in support of UNMIK.

9 June 2000

